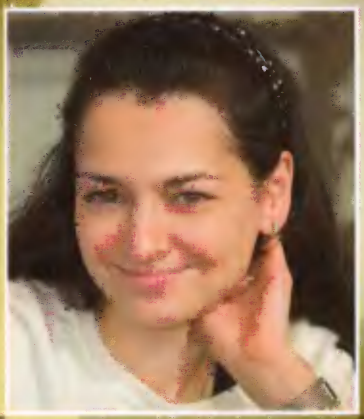
Diary
of a
Chess
QUEEN
Foreword by Anatoly KARPOV
Alexandra
KOSTENIUK

Diary of a Chess QUEEN



Fashion model, wife and mother, Alexandra Kosteniuk became the European Women's Chess Champion in 2004 and the Russian Women's Chess Champion in 2005, then prevailed in the final match for the Women's World Championship in 2008.

Women's World Chess Champion Alexandra Kosteniuk chronicles her rise to the top of the chess world in this introspective autobiographical work. Drawing from personal diaries kept during her youth, Kosteniuk takes the reader from the very dawn of her career as a child star in Russia, through triumph and disappointment, and finally to the pinnacle of success on the black-and-white battlefield. Along the way, we are treated to much more than an inside look into how a grandmaster approaches the royal game: we also learn the unique challenges posed to a young woman pulled at once by the diverging demands of professional chess, the glamour of the modeling lifestyle, and the joys of love and family life.

Part memoir and travelogue, part game collection, *Diary of a Chess Queen* features a selection of 64 annotated games with a wide range of world-class competitors, including super-GM Sergey Karjakin and former women's world champions Zhu Chen and Antoaneta Stefanova.

MONGOOSE Press

ISBN 978-0-9791482-7-9

9 780979 148279

$24.95

52495

Alexandra KOSTENIUK

DIARY OF A CHESS QUEEN

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This book includes photographs taken by Boris Dolmatovsky, Olga Dolgina, Zhenya Minkovich, Pierre-William Henry, and Diego Garcés, as well as images from the Kosteniuk family collection.

Publisher: Mongoose Press
1005 Boylston Street, Suite 324
Newton Highlands, MA 02461
info@mongoosepress.com
www.MongoosePress.com

ISBN: 978-0-9791482-7-9
Library of Congress Control Number: 2009937440

Distributed to the trade by National Book Network
custserv@nbnbooks.com, 800-462-6420
For all other sales inquiries please contact the publisher.

Translated by: James Marfia
Layout: Andrey Elkov
Editor: Jorge Amador
Cover Design: Al Dianov
Printed in China

First English edition
0 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Dedicated to my daughter, Francesca

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FOREWORD

In this 1990 photograph, I am signing autographs at one of the Moscow chess clubs; next to me stands a little girl, who decides, after a few minutes' hesitation, to go ahead and ask me to sign her card. At the time, of course, I paid no attention to little Sasha, and could not have imagined that in a few years – 2002, to be exact – I would encounter this girl over the board in the final round of an international tournament in Spain, or that in 2008 she would become the 12th Women's World Chess Champion.

In 1975, I became the 12th World Chess Champion. I like the idea that by winning the World Championship in Nalchik in 2008, Alexandra became the 12th World Champion in the history of Women's Chess. I find it interesting that our World Champion numbers are identical. This is not the only coincidence that may be observed between Alexandra and myself. Both of us are Russians, citizens of a land rich in chess traditions; both of us were born in the Urals – I in Zlatoust, Sasha in Perm; and of course both our last names start with a "K."

As kind and sympathetic a person as Alexandra is in life, she turns into a dangerous opponent over the chessboard. She plays a very attractive, fighting style of chess, never shying away even from the most principled variations. It is thanks to players such as Kosteniuk that the line between men's and women's chess is gradually being erased. Fortunately, the emotional factor notable in women's chess remains, which often renders Alexandra's games an unpredictable and engrossing spectacle. I should note that Alexandra became the first Russian woman player to achieve the men's grandmaster title. In recent years, I have met Alexandra often in rapid tournaments, and played her in dozens

of friendly blitz games (Sasha shares my affinity for five-minute chess).

In her book, *Diary of a Chess Queen*, Alexandra speaks frankly about the complex and interesting path she had to travel, from beginning chessplayer to chess queen. You will learn how Sasha's determination and work ethic allowed her to discover her talent, and return the crown of chess to Russia. You will find also the answers to your questions about how grandmasters live and work, when their aim is to reach the heights of the Chess Olympus. The chess profession is like an iceberg: you see only the tournament appearances; meanwhile, the work you must do constantly, away from the chessboard, frequently goes unnoticed. From her opening chapters to her final suggestions, an entertaining read awaits you. For young players, this book will prove not just interesting, but also useful; for Alexandra offers many valuable practical tips, based on her own experience, which she herself learned by dint of trial and error.

A World Chess Champion bears a heavy responsibility: from that day forward, there will be thousands of little boys and girls watching and measuring themselves against her, dreaming of becoming kings and queens of chess themselves. Therefore, with all my heart I wish Alexandra success in her work to popularize chess, in her sports career, and in her life in general! And to the readers of Alexandra's new book – I wish you pleasant and thoughtful reading!

12th World Chess Champion
Anatoly Karpov

Dear Reader,

This book is not just a games collection; it is my attempt to describe the road I had to travel in order to attain the title of World Champion. In this book, I have attempted to share my secrets, my observations, my emotions, and my trials. I tried to answer whatever questions might occur to you, and to describe the most interesting moments of my life.

The book's title, *Diary of a Chess Queen*, is no accident. In the course of my narrative, I have provided excerpts from my youthful diaries which provide genuine insight into all my experiences – both the happy and the sad – and my thoughts from those days.

I attained the summit of the Chess Olympus on September 17, 2008, nearly two decades after I first discovered the world of chess. For all those years, chess was much more to me than just a game. My chess career has covered a lot of interesting encounters and discoveries, pretty combinations and embarrassing oversights, unfortunate defeats and memorable victories. Chess gave my life meaning, forcing me to keep on working and winning despite all hardships and obstacles. But at the same time, I never allowed myself to focus on chess to the exclusion of all else. The world is so interesting and varied that I could never restrict myself to nothing but life on 64 squares. I am glad that, despite my grueling training, frequent travel and complicated tournament life, I have been able to prove myself, not just as a chessplayer, but in other equally interesting roles as well.

Life is a mysterious and witty intermingling of fate and events. At the start of every journey, it is as if we open a door into the unknown. Will this journey be long, or brief? Will it lead to success, or will we shortly be forced to turn back? Every road is a winding one, and only fate will decide whether we remain on the same path we chose many years ago. Sometimes, there comes a moment where it seems to us that we are ready for something new. With the passage of time, this moment might later be called decisive. This is a time when your life's path reaches a crossroads; sometimes, you may not even know yourself which direction you will eventually choose. It is just in such moments that I love to take a look back, to re-examine and revisit everything I managed to accomplish, and renew my energies to forge ahead once again. I would hope that writing this book would help me do this.

I should like to thank all the people who helped and supported me all these years – those who believed in me, as well as those who doubted I would ever make it, and thereby forced me to work even harder. First of all, I am deeply indebted to my dearest ones: my Mom, my Dad, my beloved sister Oxana, my husband Diego, and my little girl, Francesca. Their love, devotion, and faith in me have helped me more than once to stay on my difficult course. Without Dad's enthusiasm and energy, I would not be World Champion today. Without Mom's goodness, I would never have learned to follow my heart's calling. Without my sister's love – and it has probably been no

easy thing to be a champion's sister – I would have none of those particularly sweet memories today of our childhood years, our games, and those nightly heart-to-heart talks. And without my husband's support and astonishing patience, I could never have become champion, wife, and mother.

There were some years, when things were especially difficult, when Daddy wrote hundreds of letters in search of support. Fortunately, he found some who responded and helped our family out in those tough times: Nikolai Taimanov (Metakon); Sergei Anisimov (Stins Koman); Alexander Nikolayev (Centrosol); Sergei Yevdokimov, Eduard Don and Alexei Melnikov; Alexei and Nikolai Korolev (TsMD); Arkady Dvorkovich, Ziyavudin and Magomed Magomedov. To them – my eternal gratitude.

I would also like to thank my teachers and trainers. These were, first of all, my Dad, who put his whole heart and soul into my chess development; also, the noted Moscow trainer and pedagogue, Alexander Nikolayevich Novikov; International Grandmasters Alexei Korotylev, Alexander Chernin, and Konstantin Landa. I should like to address words of special thanks to Grandmaster Yuri Sergeyevich Razuvaev, who has helped me on my chess journey since 2004. His priceless counsel, amazingly refined annotations, and faith in me opened up a new world of chess to me, and helped me continue to work and struggle.

Many thanks to all these people.

Yours sincerely,
Alexandra Kosteniuk

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Chapter 1
Those Wonderful Childhood Years

I first became acquainted with chess more than twenty years ago. On April 23, 1989, my birthday present was a board and a set of chess pieces, and my first lesson from Dad. After two months' work, I had already learned the rules and could play the game. In the fall of that same year, Dad took me to the Hall of Pioneers near the Medvedkovo subway station, where I succeeded in outplaying several players older than me, and was awarded the 4th category *(roughly equivalent to a U.S. Chess Federation rating of 1200-1400 – ed.)*.

From my earliest lessons, Dad devoted a lot of time to blindfold training. First I would try to guess the color of a square without looking at the board. Then, when I had absorbed this lesson, and could easily see the entire board with my eyes closed, we played over many of the elementary positions and solved problems blindfolded. The first major tournament for me – which did not end very successfully – was the Little Octobrists Tournament in the fall of 1990 (which in those days had replaced the Moscow Championship) for children below age 10. At that time there were very few girls playing, and boys and girls played in the same tournament. I scored 2 points out of 8, winning my first- and last-round games.

The following year, playing in the same age group, my result improved to 6 out of 8. I lost just two games – to Alexander Grischuk and Vitaly Kunin – showed the best result among the girls, and was awarded the title of Moscow Champion among girls under 10. Immediately after this tournament, the newspaper *Moskovskaya Pravda* ran an article about me under the heading, "Remember This Name!", and I had to sign my first-ever autographs.

Those were not the easiest of times in Russia. In order to feed his family and still have the opportunity to work with me, Dad – who had by then decided to resign his Army commission – went to various institutions, firms, and acquaintances, looking for those who would be willing to give financial assistance to a small but talented little girl. Sometimes I would also have to earn money by playing for stakes. Dad would take my sister and me to hotels, such as the Rossiya, Intourist, or Slavyanskaya, and leave us there to play for stakes. Since I had been a very introverted child from my earliest years, Oxana would be the one to find opponents for me; my job was to beat them. Since that time, I have been very careful with money, because I knew what it was worth from a very young age. Thankfully, Russia has always been a country as rich in philanthropists as it is in talent; and people were found who supported and aided both me and my family, providing us

Playing a game at the Under-10 Moscow Championship, 1991

with funds for training and for traveling to tournaments.

A month after winning the Moscow Championship, in January 1992, I made my first trip to the Russian Junior Championship. The Under-10 Russian Championship took place in Lipetsk; and I only remember that we had to stay in an unheated hotel. Nevertheless, in spite of my youth I performed very successfully, taking second place with 6 out of 9 points. A few months after the Lipetsk championship, it was announced that, in order to select representatives for the 1992 World Youth Championships in Europe, an additional Russian Championship would be organized, this one to take place in St. Petersburg. At this championship, I was not as successful as in Lipetsk; returning to Moscow empty-handed, we once again set to work.

In the third grade, 1993

During this time, my sister was growing up. Oxana began studying the rules of chess at the same time I did; she was not yet two years old. By her second birthday, Ksiusha already knew the names of all the pieces and could set up the starting position. Here's a short excerpt from a newspaper article by Y. Saburov from 1992: "...Five-year-old Oxana and eight-year-old Sasha Kosteniuk are active, playful little sisters, ready at any moment to break out into loud laughter; they happily dance and sing, love chocolates and waffles; and when it comes to porridge, they prefer wheat (Sasha) and barley (Oxana)...These little girls devote six hours every day to their favorite game. Both of these young players favor an attacking style, and have a number of victories to their credit. But if Oxana (or Ksiusha, her family nickname), who holds a third-category ranking, is known so far only in Moscow's Pervomaisky district, the name of first-category player Sasha Kosteniuk is already known to many. Battling Sasha over the chessboard is becoming tougher and tougher. Her knowledge of the secrets of chess grows ever deeper. Sporting and creative growth for a chessplayer is unthinkable without competition in Russian and international tournaments. Not long ago, all expenses in this regard would be absorbed by committees on physical education and sport. But now, such possibilities no longer exist. One would hope that the Russian and Moscow Committees on physical education and sport, the chess federations, and charitable funds might take an interest in these young and talented players. And perhaps, in some commercial firms there might be some farsighted financiers who

With my younger sister, Oxana

might be prepared to take a long-term interest in this chess family."

In the fall of 1992, at 8 years of age, I became Moscow Champion once again, scoring 9 out of 9 in the Girls' Under-10 section. It was my sister Oxana's first championship; at age 5 she was fighting on equal terms with ten-year-olds. For this championship, we were intentionally paired in the first round, to prevent us from fixing our game in the later rounds. There are times when life in children's tournaments resembles a tragicomedy. At this level, the battles between parents and between trainers have already begun. Each one thinks that his children, or his students, are the best. Ksiusha and I were always suspected of telling each other moves, or of being told moves, so we were always followed and watched. Today it's

Oxana Kosteniuk attacks!

really funny to look back on this; but the most interesting thing is that, when I read various articles about Moscow junior tournaments now, I find that nothing has changed. It's a good thing that chess is such an aboveboard kind of sport. Everything is decided at the chess table, and not by judges.

In the spring of 1993, the whole family traveled to Kazan for the next Russian Championship. I scored 8 out of 9 and shared first and second places; but my tie-breaks put me in second place. According to the tournament rules, I was supposed to fly to the European Championships in Hungary that summer. But the Russian Chess Federation didn't buy our tickets in time, which put my trip in jeopardy. From 1993 to 1995, our family received a great deal of help from Nikolai Gelmanovich Taimanov and his company, Metakon; hearing of this injustice, he offered to transport us to Sheremetyevo airport and buy our tickets himself. Packing our bags, we went straight to the airport, but found there were no tickets to Hungary that evening.

And that's how my first trip out of Russia fell through. I won't go into how awful it felt for a 9-year-old girl, who had been so eagerly awaiting this trip, not to be able to travel to this Championship, simply because some bureaucrat forgot to buy the tickets. But sometimes life gives us some very unpleasant surprises; chess teaches us always to keep on fighting.

My parents, who had promised to buy me a kitten if I did well at the European Championships, decided to give me one anyway. I recall the day we bought Kaska very well. In an atmosphere of utmost secrecy, Mom and Dad told me

and Oxana that there was something we had to do right away. We quickly got ready, and rode to the Arbatskaya metro station. In those days, there was a small bird market on the sidewalk in front of the Khudozhestvenny Theater. Almost immediately, we saw a woman holding two tiny little furballs – a dark one and a light one. After some thought, we decided on the light-colored female kitty with stunning lantern eyes. Returning home, we left the kitten alone in our bedroom, so as to give it time to get used to the place. Five minutes later, we returned to the room; but it took us another twenty minutes to find where the kitten had gone: she was hiding in the underwear drawer under the bed. We thought for a long time over what to call her. In those days, Daddy was reading a book about Capablanca with the title, *Caissa's Beloved;* when we returned from our swimming lesson at the Hall of Pioneers, he suggested we name it Kaissa. Thus did the "Goddess of Chess" – or just "Kaska" – come to live in our home.

The Kosteniuk sisters with the fluffy "Goddess of Chess"

This Hall of Pioneers (now called the House for Children's and Young People's Creativity) which I just mentioned played no small role in the lives of my sister and myself. In those days, the Pioneer Houses and clubs within them played a notable role. The staff there considered working with children to be a true calling. In this Hall, my sister and I learned how to swim. There we also took our first lessons at the Young Journalists' School. I also participated in every other activity I could – in karate, gymnastics, art, and so forth. Special mention must be made of the chess circle of the Pervomaisky Hall of Pioneers and of its trainer – Alexander Nikolayevich Novikov. Many strong chessplayers came out of this ordinary chess club in eastern Moscow. His students Alexey Korotylev, Vladimir Kosyrev, Vitaly Kunin, Elena Lopatskaya, and others, went on to become international grandmasters. Undoubtedly, the greatest credit for this belongs to Alexander Nikolayevich and his ability to work with children. I can recall some of his aphorisms to this day, such as, "Stop that yelling, I'm running out of ears!" Strangely enough, I also remember the first time we met. When I was 7, in 1991, Daddy took me to the Hall of Pioneers, and Alexander, making a little figure with his fingers, asked me what it was. I was struck dumb, unable to think of an answer. Turned out it was a knight. I began attending the chess circle twice a week, playing in junior round-robins to gain rating categories, and to play for the Hall's team in Moscow tournaments.

After neglecting to buy those tickets in 1993, not only did the chess bureaucrats not apologize – in the following year, 1994, they forced me to start the quali-

In a simul against the seventh World Chess Champion, Vassily Smyslov

fying process all over again. The 1994 Russian Championship took place in Yaroslavl. Once again, I failed to take the gold – again, I tied for first and second, this time with Evgenia Meshcheriakova from Voronezh; and once again, I placed second on tiebreaks. After this tournament, I was awarded the first-category ranking, and began serious preparations for the trip to my first European Championship.

Looking back on it, one might say that I was fortunate to take only second place in the Russian Championships at Yaroslavl. Instead of traveling to just one country, I ended up traveling to three in the summer of 1994. It happened that before the European Championship the Yugoslav youth team invited the Russian Junior Team to play a friendly match, so instead of only going to Romania I also went to Yugoslavia. Then, when it was time for the World Championships in Hungary, as a result of changes taking place in the Russian Chess Federation two Russian teams were sent to that competition instead of one, and so I was allowed to play in the Girls' Under-10 World Championship too.

I still have pleasant memories of this first junior match out of country, in Yugoslavia. Belgrade welcomed us with amazing weather. The Russian children stayed with the families of the Yugoslav children. During the match, I lived with the family of a local girl, Vesna Djurić; for the match itself, I played against Elena Popović, the Yugoslav Under-10 Champion. The locals greeted us very warmly. During our walks through Belgrade, my father and I found a chess pavilion in the central park, much like those in our own parks, where grandpas were playing. Of course, I played a few games, and a crowd gathered. We left the park to excited yells of, "Tal! She's going to be another Tal!" It always impresses people to see a little girl outplaying grown men at chess. In the same park, Dad found mulberries growing, which we ate happily. I still remember the reaction of the locals when Dad and I bought some fresh green peas at the market and started eating them right away. At first, the locals tried to explain that you don't eat peas raw, but cooked; but then, they decided to put up with this strange Russian habit.

The organization of the children's match was at a very high level. The participants were met by the mayor of Belgrade, and the games were broadcast on local television. I won my match 2-0,

and the match score also ended in favor of Russia. I left completely delighted with Yugoslavia, with the organization, and with the people who took care of us. Afterwards, the Russian team traveled by bus to Romania, where the European Junior Championships were held in the small resort town of Baile Herculane.

It was an unpleasant surprise for us to find when we arrived that the food for the children at the hotel was very bad, while the hotel itself was pretty expensive, since Dad had to pay for his own room out of pocket. So we found private lodgings: a nice little cottage, with pleasant hosts, to which we moved.

We liked Baile Herculane very much. My dad and I hiked up the hills surrounding the little town. We caught fireflies, washed in coldwater springs, bathed in a mineral-water spa fed by hot springs, and gobbled enormous, juicy sweet cherries.

A successful performance at the European Under-10 Championships – my first international gold medal – made my first start an excellent springboard for further appearances.

No. 1 King's Knight Opening C40

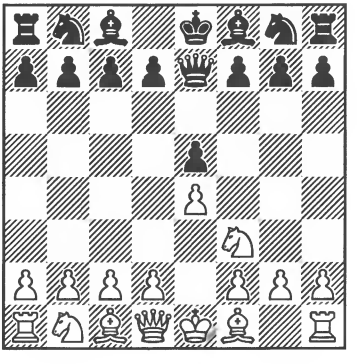
T. Chalabashvili – A. Kosteniuk

Baile Herculane 1994

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♕e7!?

The chief problem which is often faced by trainers of junior players is not simply how to explain – in the small amount of time that children devote to chess activities – the rules of the game and the basic principles of chess play, but also to find enough time to acquaint the student with theoretical variations. And with all this, you must also take into account that the opening lines which mainly appear in junior tournaments diverge significantly from established theory. Gambits, traps, and sacrifices are what you see most of all. In fact, it's far easier to show your student three moves with a definite goal – that of giving mate – than it is to spend hours explaining the nuances of the Ruy López.

Since my father and I spent most of our time working on strengthening my play in the middle- and endgame, my opening knowledge was quite limited – I would study a few games right before the round, and that was it. The main idea was for me to get out of the opening without great losses. After 2...♕e7, I at least knew my plan, and that meant I also knew what my next few moves would be. And it was no less important that my opponent would have to start thinking on her own at once.



3.♘c3

Black's plan is as follows: ...c7-c6, ...d7-d6, ...g7-g6, ...f7-f6, ...♗g7, ...♘d7, ...♘h6-f7. I recall that, when I was young, I believed the plan of b2-b3, ♗a3 and d2-d4 would refute this system.

3...c6 4.♗c4

Perhaps White should start fighting for the center at once with 4.d4.

4...g6 5.d3 ♘h6 6.0-0 f6 7.♖e1 ♘f7 8.d4 d6 9.♗e3 ♗g7 10.h3 ♘d7

Black has carried out her plan.

11.a3

11.a4!? was worth considering. In this kind of position, White can play more aggressively; however, we should not lose sight of the fact that ten-year-old girls are sitting at the board here.

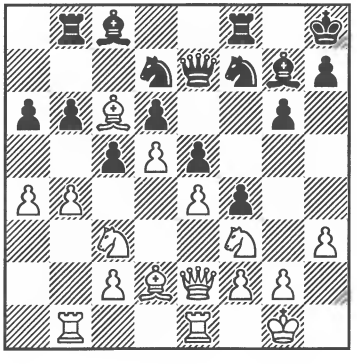
11...0-0 12.d5 c5 13.b4 b6 14.♗b5 a6 15.♗c6

Children find it very difficult to play in situations where they see no concrete targets. The only piece which could be attacked was the rook at a8, which is why White makes such a weird maneuver with her bishop.

15...♖b8 16.♖b1 f5

Meanwhile, Black has chosen a different target: the white king. In a position with a closed pawn center, this seems logical enough.

17.a4 f4 18.♗d2 ♔h8 19.♕e2



19...♘g5!?

Removing one of the white monarch's defenders.

20.♔h2 ♘xf3 21.♕xf3 ♔g8?!

Losing the thread. Black should be playing this in sharp King's Indian mode, since her attack on the kingside is clearly going to come in ahead of her opponent's assault on the queenside. For example: 21...cxb4 22.♖xb4 ♘c5 (the immediate 22...♕h4 23.♗xd7 ♗xd7 24.♖eb1 g5 wouldn't be bad either, but the knight move has a better idea: with the white bishop out of play at c6, why allow my opponent to exchange it?) 23.♖eb1 ♕h4 24.♖xb6 ♖xb6 25.♖xb6 g5, with a very strong attack.

22.b5?

Of her own accord, White closes up the game where she is stronger. Now Black has nothing to worry about, and can start active operations on the kingside.

22...a5 23.♕d3?

After this move, Black's attack unfolds by itself.

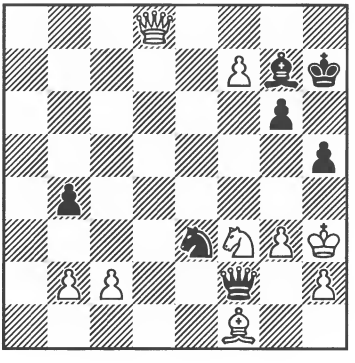
23...f3 24.g4 ♕h4 25.♕f1 ♘f6 26.g5 ♗xh3

White resigned.

In the summer of that same year, I played in my first Junior World Championship in Szeged, Hungary, in the Girls' Under-10 section.

A. Kosteniuk – S. Cherednichenko

Szeged 1994



This moment decided the gold medal. Had I found the uncomplicated winning line, then instead of sharing first place, I would have stood on the top step of the pedestal by myself.

37.f8♕??

37.♕g8+ ♔h6 38.♕h8+! ♗xh8 39.f8♕+ ♗g7 40.♕f4+ ♔h7 41.♘g5+ wins.

37...♕xf1+ 38.♔h4 ♘g2+ 39.♔g5 ♕b5+ 40.♕c5 ♕xc5+

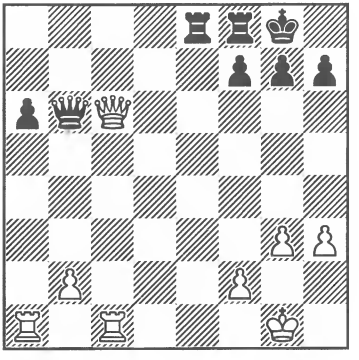
White resigned, as mate is unavoidable.

After that star-studded 1994, the next year turned out to be its exact opposite. I did not play in the Russian Championship, having earned the right to travel to both the World and European Championships without needing to qualify. In 1995, I moved into a different age group, and both the European Championship in the French city of Verdun, and the World Championship in São Lourenço, Brazil – where, for the first time in my life, I flew without my family – turned out disastrously for me.

Two medals from 1994

L. Genova – A. Kosteniuk

Verdun 1995

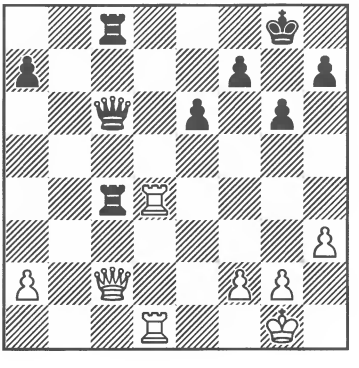


Here, I completely missed the winning 32...♖e1+! 33.♔g2 ♕xc6+ 34.♖xc6 ♖xa1, and after **32...♕xc6 33.♖xc6 ♖e2,** we agreed to a draw.

Two years later, against Riazantsev, I showed that I had learned that lesson well.

A. Kosteniuk – A. Riazantsev

Moscow 1997



43.♖xc4 ♕xc4 44.♖d8+ ♔g7 45.♖xc8 Black resigned.

A memorably amusing incident occurred while Daddy and I were traveling to the European Championships in Verdun. Daddy decided that, inasmuch as the championship was being held in France, for us to fly to France without seeing Paris would just be wrong. So we traveled to Verdun separately from the Russian delegation, in order to go through Paris. As soon as we were on our way to Verdun, we saw that the tickets for a trip through France would be very expensive, leaving us without enough money for the train trip back home, since the idea had been to spend an entire week in Paris. So we set off for Paris by bus. Reaching the French capital at night, we located a small hotel on the outskirts of Paris, and went to the Aeroflot offices on the Champs-Élysées in order to trade our tickets for an earlier date. At that point, we still hadn't had much experience with air travel; and it turned out that, in order to change the date on our tickets, we had to pay still more. Having left the last of our cash with Aeroflot, all we had were tickets for the next day's flight, and not a penny to our name. That evening, we went to the bus station by the Arc de Triomphe, from where the buses leave for the Paris airport, and Dad attempted to explain to the driver that we had absolutely no money, and offered him everything we did have, in rubles and kopecks; but despite the fact that the bus stood empty, the driver refused to take us without payment. Thus, we remained in the middle of Paris; and in the morning, we would still have to somehow make it to the airport.

And here was where my skill at playing for stakes came in handy. I took out my chessboard (I always traveled

At the Eiffel Tower: Paris, 1995

The lucky suitcase chess set

to tournaments with my little suitcase-talisman that my father had made for me, and on which one of Dad's friends had written, "To Sashenka – Future World Chess Champion"), and began looking for opponents. By the time the sun rose over Paris, I had earned enough to buy bus tickets. While waiting for the first bus of the day, I was walking through the Champs-Élysées, when up from the subway a man came walking. When I suggested to him that we should play a game of chess for a stake, his eyebrows shot up; he took my hand, passed some sort of special contraption – a necklace with a thin silver ribbon, evidently meant for fortune-telling, and agreed to play. During our game, he discovered that Dad and I were from Russia, and he became even more emotional upon seeing that we were in such dire straits. He explained to us – even though he did not speak any Russian – that he was in fact Count Grigoroff, and considered himself Russian. How we got along, and in what language, it's hard to say; but Dad had often worked out agreements and talked with people from all over the world, even though he knew no language other than Russian. After our game, the Count took us to a café, treated us to hot chocolate

At my first computer, 1993

Participants at the Russian Under-12 Championship, Volgograd 1996

and croissants, and when we left, gave us 1500 francs – an enormous sum for us, on which our family was able to live that whole summer. Many years later, when I myself was able to live in Paris, I attempted to seek out this Count, but unfortunately without success...

These misfortunes of '95 forced Dad and me to work that much harder. It was in 1995, in fact, that Daddy worked out and created the well-known chess program, "Alexandra," which helped me to make a good study of the endgame. Whenever Daddy had to go out on business or to seek sponsorship, this program became my trainer. I could spend hours in front of the computer screen, trying to earn the maximum number of points.

The year 1996 began with a convincing win in the Russian Championships at Volgograd – 9 out of 9! This was my first gold in the Russian Championships. European and World titles have always come easier to me than victories in the Russian arena.

Before the championships began in Volgograd, since we could not afford to live in the hotel, Dad found a granny who agreed to loan us a room in her apartment for the duration of the tournament. It was precisely because of this quality of Dad's character – to have no fear of difficulties, but to meet them with unexpected moves and ideas – that our family has been able to accomplish so much. For example, in that same summer, I was able to travel to the European Under-12 Championships, just because Dad believed that there's no such thing as a no-win situation. At that moment, we were without sponsors; and we needed $1500 to get to Rimavská Sobota (Slovakia). From the Yugoslav journalist Ratko Knežević, Dad learned that once a week, in one of the Moscow casinos, they held a drawing of admission tickets, with a first prize of exactly $1500. He gathered the last of our family's money to buy a ticket for the casino, went in, and won the money! The following day, he took the money for the trip to the Russian Chess Federation. This twist of fate helped me become European Junior Champion for a second time, this time in the Under-12 age group. Scoring 8 out of 9, I took clear first place.

In the summer of 1996, I also got my first official rating. I remember, as though it were yesterday, that on the FIDE July 1, 1996 rating list, I entered the list of Top-Ten Girls Under 20, with a rating of 2295!

In the fall of the same year, I traveled to the Junior World Championships, held on the island of Menorca, in the city of Cala Galdana. Although by that time I still had not had much experience playing in tournaments, even then I knew that the organization of many junior tournaments left a lot to be desired. It was obvious that, for some organizers of junior championships, this was mostly an opportunity to make a lot of money. There are few who think first and foremost of the children. In 1994, at both the World and the European World Championships, for instance, the playing hall and the playing conditions were pretty good, but the food was far below even middling standards. My father was always able to find some way of feeding us, other than what the organizers offered. I was very picky as a child, and would not eat anything that was even a little less than the standard I was used

to at home (and Mama is a marvelous cook); so feeding me at tournaments was a tough job. But this turned out not to be a problem on Menorca. And thanks to the support of the Centrosol company president, Alexander Nikolaev, I traveled to this tournament, not just with my father, but with Mama as well. We had a buffet table, a beach, a pool, and a room set up for table tennis, where many of the tournament participants spent their evenings.

I remember that at 12, I was very superstitious. If I won a game, for the following round I tried to follow the same route to the board and to wear the same clothes. I would write down the moves with the same pen, and of course, I carried a number of little lucky talismans. In Cala Galdana, I was very "unlucky": I decided not to have breakfast before the first round, which meant I had to forgo all those rich breakfasts for the remainder of the tournament. It was only on the very last day, after the prize ceremony, that I came down to breakfast and realized what I had been denying myself all that time...

No. 2 Queen's Gambit Declined D35
Zhao Xue – A. Kosteniuk
Cala Galdana 1996

1.c4

Even in junior tournaments, the Chinese players were among the top competitors, so encounters with them frequently turned out to be the key matchups.

1...e6 2.♘c3 d5 3.cxd5 exd5 4.d4 ♘f6 5.♗g5 ♗e7 6.e3 c6 7.♗d3 0-0 8.♘ge2

This is the classic Carlsbad structure. As a child, for a long time I played the

Junior World Championships, Menorca 1996. Left to right: Toma Chistyakova, María Espínola, the author, and Tanya Kosintseva

system coded as "TMB" – that is, the Tartakower-Makogonov-Bondarevsky system – against closed openings. I attended lectures explaining this opening in the Pervomaisky Hall of Pioneers, given by Alexander Novikov.

You need to work on your openings repertoire your whole life. Although it's a great temptation to teach children nothing but the trap variations, a trainer needs to understand that there will inevitably come a time when the student must switch from the gambit openings to more classical ones; and the sooner, the better. Often enough, I regretted not starting to study the classics, and the classic opening setups, earlier in life. I spent a lot of my childhood playing "offbeat" openings, like the Scandinavian Defense for Black and the Vienna Gambit for White. I only began studying the Ruy López, for instance, when I was 16. And by "study," I mean analyzing the games played by the classic players of these openings. The foundation of the edifice known as "The Openings" should be the games first, and only then the variations. It's a well-known truism in chess that what's new is only what's well and truly forgotten. To keep from constantly reinventing the wheel, one should begin as early as possible to study the golden classics.

8...♘bd7 9.♘g3

I don't know whether this move meant that my opponent was trying to copy Alekhine's play in the 32nd game of his match with Capablanca (Buenos Aires 1927), or if she was already starting to get creative.

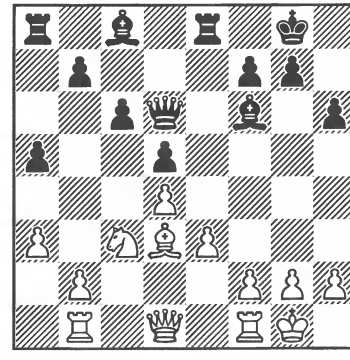
9...h6

Of course, the continuation that Capablanca employed here – 9...♘e8 – would hardly have entered my head then.

10.♗xf6 ♘xf6 11.♘h5 ♖e8 12.♘xf6+ ♗xf6 13.0-0 ♕d6

White is clearly running late with her "required" program – the queenside minority attack. Meanwhile, Black already has the advantage of the bishop pair, which she exploits convincingly enough.

14.♖b1 a5 15.a3



15...♗d8!?

The bishop was doing nothing on f6, biting on the granite wall of the d4-pawn; therefore I transfer it to c7, creating the "queen + bishop" battery, pointing unequivocally at the white king. In playing a game of chess, you must frequently make use of the two basic principles of piece play:

1) watch out for unprotected pieces; and

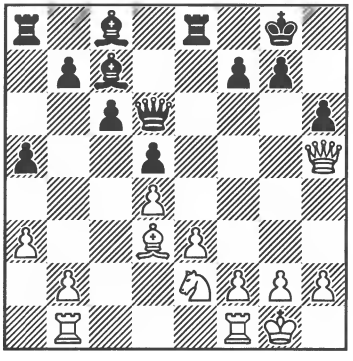
2) improve the position of your own pieces.

The first principle is usually the one explained to the youngest players: it's easiest to win a piece that's not protected. So we must try to keep our pieces on protected squares, and keep an eye out for opposing pieces that have been left

unprotected. The second principle is more complicated. Here we're talking about a sense of harmony, of pieces working together. You must try to focus young players' attention as early as possible on making sure that every piece finds something to do, that none of the pieces should stand around idly, or be poorly situated – that is, in a place where they cannot function at full capacity.

16.♕h5 ♗c7 17.♘e2?

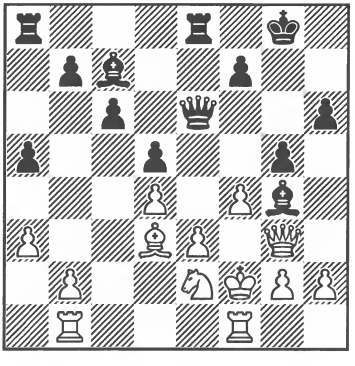
Failing to notice her opponent's resource. 17.♖fe1!? was better, to defend against the threat of ...♗g4.



17...♗g4!

Accurately exploiting the opportunity White offers.

18.♕h4 g5 19.♕g3 ♕d7 20.f4 ♕e6 21.♔f2



21...♔f8!

A powerful prophylactic move. Such "quiet" moves are always difficult for children to find. Black moves her king away from its *vis-à-vis* with the opposing queen, and creates a tactical threat.

22.♖be1 ♗xe2 23.♔xe2

23.♗xe2 would be met decisively by 23...gxf4 24.exf4 ♕e4, with a double attack. White cannot defend her pawns.

23...♗xf4 24.♖xf4 gxf4 25.♕xf4

The rest is a matter of technique. However, tournament practice shows us that the realization of an advantage is not the simplest of tasks.

25...♖e7 26.♔d2 ♖ae8 27.♗h7 ♔g7 28.♗f5 ♕f6 29.g4 c5

We all know that rooks need open lines! Additionally, the white king is stuck in the middle of the board, so opening lines will help to create a direct attack.

30.♔d3 cxd4

30...♕b6 was more exact, since with her king in the center, White would have had a very difficult defense. But I had evidently decided that, since my own king was also somewhat exposed, a transition into the endgame would be the most practical decision. Perhaps the realization of my advantage would be somewhat more drawn-out, but I would certainly be less likely to overlook some unpleasant move for my opponent.

31.♕xd4 ♕xd4+ 32.♔xd4 ♔f6 33.♖f1 ♔g7 34.♖f3

Owing to the weakness of the pawn at e3, the rook must take up a passive position in any case. 34.♖e1 ♖e5 35. h3 h5 is no better – Black is opening another line for her rooks.

34...f6 35.h4 ♖e5 36.h5 ♖8e7 37.b4 ♖c7 38.♗d3 axb4 39.axb4 ♖c1

After the black rook enters the enemy camp, White can no longer put up any resistance.

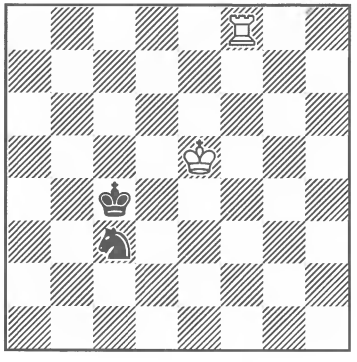
40.♖f5 ♖d1 41.♔c3 ♖g1 42.♖xe5 fxe5 43.♗f5 ♔f6 44.b5 b6

White resigned. In this competition, I scored 10½ points out of 11, and confidently secured first place.

However, there was one unpleasant episode that occurred two rounds before the end of the tournament.

A. Kosteniuk – E. Pähtz

Cala Galdana 1996



84.♖c8+

In this position, my opponent's flag fell, and the arbiter awarded White the win. That same evening, the German delegation lodged a protest, based on their allegation that I had played on the clock in a known drawn position, and that the arbiters watching the conclusion of the game had failed to adjudicate the draw. Despite the fact that the last pawn capture in this game had occurred on move 63, while my opponent's flag had fallen on move 84 (which means that my opponent did not yet have the right to claim the draw under the 50-move rule), the claim was granted, and the result of the game was changed to a draw. Our delegation preferred to take no action, consoling me by pointing out that, after all, I still had a lot of points.

Unfortunately, I often had to deal with this kind of attitude on the part of our federations (and not only the chess federation) towards their sportsmen. The main thing that we have to teach our sports bureaucrats is that, until we learn to respect our own sportsmen and defend their interests, everybody else will continue to treat them just the way I was treated here.

At age 12, you don't think about the importance of points and results – you just play chess; so I accepted this unjustified decision quietly enough, won my last two games, and secured first place, becoming World Under-12 Girls' Champion. Second place went to Elisabeth Pähtz – who clearly got a lot of help from the half-point she got from our game – while third went to Ilze Berzina.

The year 1996 did not end for me with victory at the Under-12 Girls' World Championship in Cala Galdana. By year's end, I had also managed to win the World Rapid Championship in Paris, where we lived and played in the famous Disneyland, and the organization was beyond praise. I also succeeded in winning the first adult tournament of my life. With 7½ points out of 9, I took first place in the Russian Women's Rapid Championship.

After my 1996 victory, the Eurovision company shot some film of me and my family, which they titled, "How to Become a Queen." This film, with its

Menorca 1996: First World Championship gold. Left to right: Ilze Berzina (silver), the author (gold), Elisabeth Pähtz (bronze)

guileless child's commentary on the joys of those days, is most touching to watch now, more than a decade later.

One of the very first entries in my diary is my assessment of the year 1996:

In 1996, I wanted to: 1. Get rated; 2. Win between 1st and 3rd places at the World and European Championships (that is, if I go) – it was a good year! I did it all!

In her professional career, a chess-player often faces a choice: whether to go on playing at an amateur level, or to work at chess as a professional; whether to continue playing in children's tournaments, or to participate solely as an adult; whether to enter only women's tournaments, or to start playing against men right from the start. Just as in life, in our destined field of chess we must often make decisions which turn out to be critical. In 1997, after a bad result at the Junior World Championships, Dad decided that this Junior World Championship was to be my last, and that I should learn to play chess with adults. Junior tournaments always feature a particular atmosphere. I switched to adult chess early on, and often look back with regret on those junior events, and how little time I was able to spend playing in them. This may be the reason why I began to hold the annual children's tournaments called the Alexandra Kosteniuk Cup, where each year I try to create a real chess holiday for its young participants.

This marked the end of the first stage of my chess career and the beginning of something completely different: the struggle to survive in adult chess. For I was used to winning in junior events. When I began playing against adults, the wins would not come quickly; and I had to experience both the agony of defeat and the despair that comes when nothing goes right. But time passed; and the final outcome did, of course, justify that difficult decision in 1997.

Chapter 2
Elista – The City of Chess

The 1997 Russian Women's Championship in Elista was my debut in serious women's tournaments, as well as my first trip to Elista. I was 13 years old, and of course I was somewhat afraid of my famous opponents, such as Alisa Galliamova, Ekaterina Kovalevskaya, and Svetlana Matveeva. Interestingly, in a few years, I would be playing alongside these famous chessplayers on the Russian women's team.

Elista was already known to chess fans after the 1996 match between Karpov and Kamsky. The construction of the famous Chess City and Ostap Bender Prospekt (Avenue) were still in the planning stages; nevertheless, Elista itself was a place I liked well enough to fall in love with. On our free day, the championship participants were taken on a tour of Kalmyk schools. By order of the President of the Republic, Kirsan Ilyumzhinov, chess had been made one of the principal subjects of the school curriculum; so in every school the children greeted us with pieces and boards set up and ready for simultaneous exhibitions. It was my luck to travel to the village of Iki-Chonos, where in addition to the simul I visited the Churul (or Buddhist temple) and took a horseback ride. Whenever I have visited Elista after this, I have also made sure to visit the school in this little village, often leaving the children chess-related gifts. In my first Russian Women's Championship, I did not do too badly, scoring 5½ points out of 9.

After Elista, I played in a round-robin tournament, the Pripis Memorial in Moscow, where I scored 6 out of 11, earning the final norm for the Women's International Master title, which I was awarded in September of that year at the FIDE Congress. My family spent the summer together in Spain, where I competed in three junior tournaments. The first of these was similar to the Linares Super-tournament, except that the field consisted only of boys and girls.

Even as I was participating in these tournaments and training sessions, I continued to live the life of an average youngster – that is, I attended school and hung out with friends. I studied at Moscow School No. 619. School was great – every day at school felt like a holiday to me. Here I should note that the school's director was very accommodating, allowing me to go to class just two days a week starting in the fifth grade. This allowed me to spend more time on chess and to travel to tournaments. Of course, I did all my homework every day, getting my assignments from my classmates. Thus, my progress in school remained unaffected by my peculiar attendance.

My diary contains the following evaluation of the year 1997:

Next to Ostap Bender's statue in Elista

On horseback at Iki-Chonos, Kalmykia, 1997

What has the past year brought me? Strangely, I had expected far worse results this year. 1. I earned my 3rd WIM (Women's International Master) norm; 2. I earned my 1st WGM (Women's Grandmaster) norm. My rating for 1.01.1998 stands at 2260 (a loss of 15 points). Of course, there were negatives, as well: I took home nothing from the 1997 World Championships (Girls Under-14). But on the whole, I am very satisfied with this past year. December 27, 1997.

In 1998, Oxana and I began attending the Young Journalists' School at the Pervomaisky Hall of Pioneers, where the notable teacher Natalya Nikolayevna Polyakova so entranced the students with her own stories that, after these lessons, we all got top grades on our own compositions. After our work at this school, Oxana entered the journalism school at Moscow State University a few years later, and I began writing poetry regularly.

Here's one of my first compositions:

A BUSH

In the deep woods, where
there's neither sun, nor light,
There grew a small bush,
wrapped in shadow.
As pretty as a bird on the wing,
As a delicate flower,
caressed by spring.

He was lonely, living alone
in the world,
With the darkening wood
to keep him warm.
He did not live long
in his dark prison,

And when he left, he took
all his thoughts with him.

Competition in blitz and rapid tournaments has always been an integral part of my training process. Starting in 1993, even as a very little girl, I began playing regularly at Moscow's Central Chess Club on 14 Gogolevsky Boulevard. On Wednesdays, they would hold 10-minute tournaments; on Saturdays, it was blitz; and on Sundays, 15-minute games. I remember Auntie Shura Koroleva, the Club's hearthkeeper, who handed out the clocks, kept order, and sent tardy players back home. We would often take the subway to the club together, while Auntie Shura would tell me about the famous women players she remembered from when they were girls as small as I. Unfortunately, I did not come along in time to be able to sit down for a blitz game with Tal or Petrosian at the Central Chess Club; but when I grew older, the building on Gogolevsky Boulevard remained a chess club, where one might still have a game against amateurs. I played not only in the rapid tournaments, but also in grown-up round-robins, with norms for the attainment of categories – tournaments which are no longer held there. The club is no longer the Central Chess Club: nowadays, they call it the "Central Chessplayers' House" and it seems that, with the name change, something died within the building...

When the Central Chess Club stopped holding its rapid tournaments, my father found a different club, where he started taking me regularly, and which I visit occasionally to this day. This is the October Chess Club, located in the very center of Moscow, on Great Yakimanka Street, in the basement of an ordinary Moscow house. The walls of this basement have seen many a well-known chessplayer, and today the Saturday blitz tournaments draw a very strong field. All the famous Moscow blitzers have played here; and the blitzing school I went through in the October club has been an indispensable help to me in a lot of tiebreakers and blitz tournaments. I shall always treasure my memories of the October club and of its director, Sergey Kurakulov, who managed to keep the club going in a difficult time, and to create a special atmosphere that attracted a lot of players. I remember how, after the 2001 World Championship, Cable News Network filmed a report about me. At my suggestion, we went to the "October." CNN Correspondent Jill Dougherty's joy was boundless. The club's colorful atmosphere made an excellent backdrop for a telecast about Moscow's chess scene.

In 1998, I continued playing regularly in blitz tournaments. After each tournament, I tried hard to recall and write down all my blitz games. At first, it took me great effort to remember just a few moves of the opening; but in time, I could recall entire games, and would enter them, immediately after the tournament was over, into a special computer database. Here are some of my blitz games from those years.

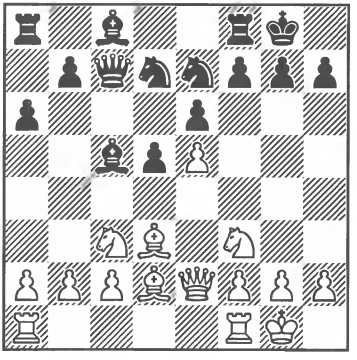
No. 3 French Defense C00
A.Kosteniuk – A. Zhuravlev
Moscow 1998 (blitz)

This was a game played at the Central Chess Club, where I was able to execute the classic bishop sacrifice at h7.

1.e4 e6 2.♘f3 d5 3.♘c3

I have used this system against the French Defense for a long time. It's nice to be able to consider myself one of the pioneer theoreticians of this setup.

3...c6 4.d4 ♘d7 5.e5 c5 6.dxc5 ♗xc5 7.♗d3 a6 8.0-0 ♕c7 9.♕e2 ♘e7 10.♗d2 0-0?



11.♗xh7+

In blitz, the initiative can sometimes be more important than material.

11...♔xh7 12.♘g5+ ♔g6 13. h4?!

Worth considering was 13.♗f4!?, shoring up the important e5-pawn.

13...♕xe5??

Loses. 13...♖h8 14.h5+ ♖xh5 15.♘xe6 fxe6 16.♕g4+ ♔f7 17.♕xh5+ would lead to an unclear game.

14.h5+ ♔f6 15.♘h7+ ♔f5 16. g4#

No. 4 Scandinavian Defense B01

D. Saulin – A. Kosteniuk

Moscow 1998 (blitz)

Another game from 1998. I have decided not to change any of my annotations, even though they might differ somewhat from the kind we are used to seeing nowadays. My father required me to use the "Alexandra" software to annotate my games. The idea was that the starting position was taken to be "+/="; consequently, if Black reached "=" in any variation, that meant that somewhere, White had made a move that led only to equality, and this move would have to be annotated with a "=". Each week, Dad would submit the database of my annotated games to the computer's scrutiny; and if our assessments diverged somewhere, I would have to correct it.

1.e4 d5

From 1996 to 1999, I made frequent use of the Scandinavian Defense; it gave me pretty good results, especially in junior tournaments.

2.exd5 ♕xd5 3.♘c3 ♕a5 4.d4 ♘f6 5.♘f3 ♗g4 6.h3 ♗h5 7.g4 ♗g6 8.♘e5 e6 9.♗g2 c6 10.h4 ♗e4 11.♘c4?!

Here, the main continuation for White is 11.♗xe4 ♘xe4 12.♕f3, with the better game.

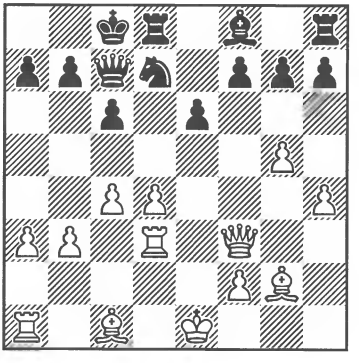
11...♕b4 12.a3 ♕xc4 13.♘xe4 ♘xe4 14.♗xe4 ♘d7 15.♖h3

15.c3 ♘f6 16.♗f3 0-0-0 17.♕e2±.

15...♘f6 16.b3 ♕a6 17.♗g2 0-0-0 18.c4?∓ ♕b6=

18...e5∓.

19.♖d3 ♕c7 20.g5 ♘d7 21.♕f3–+



21...♘e5 22.dxe5 ♕xe5+ 23.♕e3 ♕xa1 24.♖xd8+ ♔xd8 25.♔e2 ♗xa3

26.♗d2 ♗e7 27.♗c3 ♕a2+ 28.♔f3 ♕a3 29.♗xg7 ♖g8 30.♗d4 ♕a5

30...a5−+

31.♗xa7 ♕f5+ 32.♔e2 ♕c2+ 33.♔f3 ♕f5+ 34.♔e2 ♕c2+ 35.♔e1 ♗b4+ 36.♔f1 ♕d1+

White resigned.

In early 1998, in order to qualify for the Russian Women's Championship Final, I competed in the Upper League, held in the Moscow suburb of Kolontaevo. The most memorable thing about this tournament was, for me, the fierce table-tennis battles that went on immediately after the games. Nobody owned a paddle, so most of us had to use our schoolbooks.

Prior to the Russian Championship in Elista, held in April of that year, I earned the third and final norm for the Women's Grandmaster title by winning a Category III men's round-robin event. Once again, a few words from my diary:

02/14/98 I earned a grandmaster norm. The WGM norm = 8½ out of 13 (+4). Before the final round, I already had +5. In the last round, I played Zhurina – and won. So I got +6. And along with the grand-, I earned 2 IMs.

The following story from my diary was written under the heading, "An unexpected turn."

...What's this – my birthday is now "threatened" – and here's why: After my disaster in the Under-20 Russian Championship (7th place, 5 out of 11), played at Dagomys, I thought I would not get an invitation to the Russian Women's Championship. It starts on 04/20/98, and will be played as a knockout event. But it appears that some of the players declined their invitations, and so I was let in. So I'll be flying out on the 19th, which means the day after tomorrow, I'm back in the fight again! 04/18/98.

In the first round at Elista, I succeeded in getting past Tatiana Grabuzova; in the second round, however, I lost by 2-0 to Alisa Galliamova, who was at that time the premier player in Russian women's chess – and one of those losses occurred on the very day I turned 14. Nevertheless, my performance in this Championship was deemed a success. And being in Elista in April, I was able, for the first time in my life, to watch the tulips bloom on the steppes. After seeing this spectacle, I started telling everyone my favorite flowers were tulips. It was just these appearances in Elista in 1997 and 1998 that helped me, soon enough, to receive an invitation from Kirsan Ilyumzhinov to represent Team Kalmykia at the World Chess Olympiad. But first things first...

In the summer of 1998, our whole family headed off to Greece. On Mom's birthday (July 29) we gave her a video camera, and now we can recall that trip, not just in pictures, but on video as well. This is probably the best place to say a few words about my mom. It happens that in this book, I mostly talk about how my father aided my chess career. But it must be immediately emphasized that my mom, Natalya, played no less of a role in my upbringing. Up until I was 5 years old, I was fully represented by my mom. By age 5, I was a rapid reader. After our family was "infected" by chess, Mom, who had not known how to play the game before, taught herself to play, and utilized her experience as a teacher

to set up a unique, methodical program for teaching chess to preschoolers.

In those difficult days while we were growing up, Mom created such a feeling of comfort in our home that we children never even suspected the difficulties our parents had to overcome. I remember that, in order to save money on haircuts, Mom took a course in barbering, and then cut her family's hair herself for many years. When we were unable to buy anything at the store, Mom would sit down at her sewing machine and make us skirts, shorts, and dresses. I can remember her "anthill" cake to this day; nor can I get by, even now, without her sage advice. In 2005, Mom wrote and published the book, *How to Teach Chess – A Preschooler's Manual,* aimed at teachers and relatives who don't know how to play themselves, but who would like to teach their children how to play the game. In October 2006, it was through my mother's initiative that the "Alexandra" school for the study of chess was opened; and starting in 2007, we began running the Alexandra Kosteniuk Cup for children aged 6 to 8.

The first tournament I played in the summer of 1998 took place on the beautiful little island of Ikaria. The island takes its name from Icarus, son of Daedalus, who, according to myth, fled from Crete with his father, flying upon wings attached to his shoulders. Icarus flew too close to the sun, the wax holding his wings melted, and Icarus fell into the sea and drowned. And so, the sea was named the Ikarian, and the nearest island was named Ikaria. Before the tournament began, we decided that

Mother and daughter

Playing for the Kalmykian team at the 33rd World Chess Olympiad, Elista 1998

we would be there mainly to rest and relax, and that I would just play, without preparation, any way I liked. This system gave unexpectedly good results: I earned a men's International Master norm. At my second tournament, in Greece, I did not do so well – for a while we even regretted that we hadn't stayed on Ikaria rather than go to another tournament.

A few words from my diary:

Before nearly every tournament, I experience uncertainty. This uncertainty gives me no peace, because there is a great weight of responsibility on my shoulders. I have been added to the Kalmyk national team, and will play in the 1998 Olympiad. It makes me happy; but at the same time, I'm afraid I may play badly – the more so, in that after Greece, I am playing very badly in the rapid tournaments, and it always seems to me that I'm doing very little work on chess, paying it very little attention. But I still hope that everything will turn out okay, and I will justify their faith in me. 08/25/1998.

From these youthful sentences, it's obvious how worried I was, and how much I feared that I would perform badly. This internal struggle with oneself often passes unnoticed by the chess-loving public. It is precisely because of this struggle, these constant worries and fears, victories and defeats, that I love chess, and consider it to be a most complex form of sport. Tournaments, games, missed chances, and astounding combinations fill your life with meaning. But however much chess may engross you, it's always important to remember that, for all its attractions, it's still just a game. Points, goals, seconds are only important when the game's underway; when the clocks are stopped, life goes on, in which there are, unfortunately, far more terrible things, sometimes, than losing a game.

In September 1998, I went to play in the Yugoslav League; in October, I was due to travel to Elista for the World Chess Olympiad.

The World Chess Olympiad... For any chessplayer, playing in the Chess Olympiad is probably just about the same thing as it would be for any sportsman to play in the Olympic Games. Since the 1998 Olympiad would be held in Elista, Russia had the right to send three teams: the A-team, the youth team, and the Kalmyk team. Although I was only 14, I hoped to be chosen for the youth team.

There was great competition among the young Russian players. In my day, winning the Russian Junior Championship was much harder than becoming World Junior Champion. I only won our national championship for the first time in the Under-12 age group in 1996, by which time I had already won the European Girls' Under-10 Championship while also winning the silver medal at the World Championships in the same age group. After winning the Russian Championship, we would go to the World and European Championships in pursuit of gold: any finish other than in first place would be considered a disappointment.

On the other hand, stiff competition, even in one's own age group, frequently meant that young Russian players focussed mainly on beating those in their own age group. After all, making the national team – or playing against adult competition – is very hard, and not nearly as interesting, since playing in grown-up tournaments means forgetting about the medals and the top prizes. At the same time, talented children from less chess-crazed countries can make their national team rosters at a fairly young age, and test their abilities and acquire experience in grown-up events.

Of course, nowadays, when the whole system of playing for the World Championship has been thoroughly revamped, any young woman player, for example, can take part in the adult European Championship. In my view, you should begin playing in adult tournaments as early as possible – even though this of course means that someone else will be taking home the prizes in the children's championships. The years saved for developing your skills can be worth far more than a bunch of junior titles.

Having missed out on the second Russian team (which fielded the following lineup for the Elista Olympiad: Anna Dorofeeva, Ekaterina Polovnikova, Natalya Andreeva and Evgenija Ovod), I practically despaired of playing in the Olympiad – when suddenly, Kirsan Ilyumzhinov invited me to play for the Kalmyk team – that is, Russia-3. We had Julia Demina on first board, myself on second board, a local player, Baira Kharashkina, on third, and another Elistan, Anna Gelashvili, as reserve. I consider that successful performance at the Olympiad as one of the turning points in my chess career. I scored 10 points out of 13, winning the silver medal on Board Two, while my team shared 6th-10th places and came in ninth on tiebreak. This was a huge success for us, since according to our average rating we were only ranked 33rd at the outset.

At the FIDE Congress, held there in Elista, I was awarded the Women's Grandmaster title conditionally – that

is, provided I was able to raise my rating to 2300 (it was 2270 at the time). But at the Olympiad, I exceeded the norm once again; so, in accordance with FIDE rules, I was awarded the Women's Grandmaster title with no "conditions." Thus I became the youngest grandmaster in the world at that time.

No. 5 Bishop's Opening C30
A. Kosteniuk – R. Pokorna
Elista 1998

1.e4 e5 2.♗c4

From 1998 to 2000, the Bishop's Opening was my main weapon against 1...e5. In fact, this opening frequently leads to positions and structures closely related to the Italian Game or Two Knights' Defense. True, Black has more choices in the Bishop's Opening than in the Italian Game. For example, we might immediately notice that Black has not yet decided where to develop either knight; consequently, she has a variety of plans – for example, there is the idea of playing ...c7-c6 and ...d7-d5. Black's bishop is also on f8 still – she may develop it to c5, to e7, or to b4.

2...♘f6 3.d3 ♘c6 4.♘c3 ♗c5

Of course, Black has many acceptable setups here. The most energetic and straightforward of these would be ... ♗b4 (intending ...d7-d5) or ...♘a5, immediately snapping off White's bishop and preparing the ...d7-d5 advance. Later, I would make use of these ideas myself when playing Black.

At the time, I believed the move order employed by Black in this game granted White an opening advantage. Now, of course, I would find it hard to give such a categorical assessment; but I can agree that after ...♗c5, Black simply develops, paying no attention to White's concrete plans, and making no effort to carry out any concrete ideas of her own.

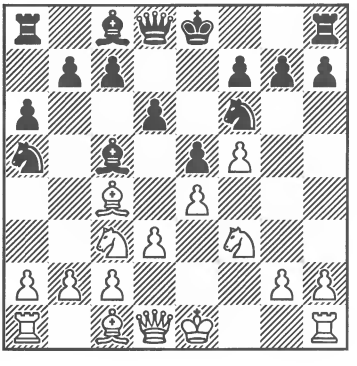
On the whole, my opening analyses from those days cannot but bring forth a smile. What a life I had: before every game, all I had to do was go over two or three variations, each 5 or 6 moves deep! Nowadays, unfortunately, such a thing would be almost inconceivable.

5.f4

White executes the main idea of the Bishop's Opening, as well as of many other open games, where she puts off the development of the knight on g1 in order to get in f2-f4 first, and only then develop the knight to f3.

5...d6 6.♘f3 a6 7.f5 ♘a5

By fixing the pawn structure with f4-f5, White gives notice of her intent to begin a kingside pawn storm. As we know, the best response to a flank attack is a counterstroke in the center. Black's last move works well with this idea: not only is she going to trade off White's light-squared bishop, she is also preparing for ...c7-c6 followed by ...d6-d5. However, the time previously lost may cost Black her chance at equality.



8.♗b3

In my 1998 commentaries, I censured this move, recommending the following variation instead: 8.a3 ♘xc4 9.dxc4 h6 10.♕e2, followed by ♗e3, with some advantage to White. It may be true that in this position, the open d-file will have much more significance than the slight fracturing of White's pawn structure that occurs after ...♘xc4; dxc4. And if Black does not take the bishop at c4, then of course White will retreat it to a2.

8...c6 9.♕e2 ♘xb3 10.axb3 b5?!

Black certainly should not have opened the a-file for her opponent, and then left herself with a weak a6-pawn on the open file. Of course, then the reader could most certainly ask the very reasonable question: "Then how should Black have continued?" Certainly, Black would not want to castle kingside. Her position is rather cramped, and sharp advances like ...b7-b5 could lead to further weakening of her position. White has an easier game to play, but she must also keep in mind that although Black's position may be passive, it's very solid; and if White starts flinging pawns wildly around on either wing, this could lead to a weakening of her own position. So I might recommend that Black play waiting moves here, such as 10...♕e7 or 10...h6, giving White the opportunity to show her hand first, while also keeping in hand the possibility of ...d6-d5.

11.♗e3 ♗b4?!

David Janowsky, in a game against Mikhail Chigorin, the founder of the Russian chess school, long ago in 1905 played 11...♕b6 in this position. After 12.♘d1 ♗b7 13.♗xc5 ♕xc5, White decided to trade queens by 14.♕f2, and the game ended in a draw after 39 moves.

12.0-0 ♘g4

Black could not seriously have expected that, after she made this move, White would give up the dark-squared bishop. I remember, when I was just beginning to compete in junior tournaments, how eagerly I would wait for my opponents to play ♗g5 or ...♗g4, pinning my knights at f6 or f3. As a rule, after h3 or h6, they would trade their bishop for my knight, which made me very happy, since I already knew how valuable a bishop could be in many kinds of positions.

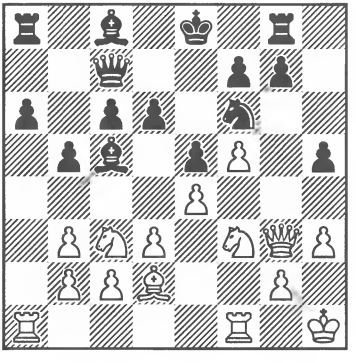
13.♗d2 ♗c5+ 14.♔h1 ♕c7 15.h3 h5

This attempt to whip up an attack with just two pieces is doomed to fail.

16.♕e1 ♘f6

The outcome of Black's energetic play has been to give herself kingside weaknesses as well.

17.♕g3 ♖g8



18.♖ae1

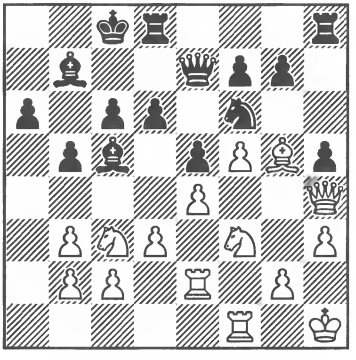
This still happens to me quite often: I see a pretty variation at the board (which usually doesn't work) and, distracted by this great idea, I make a move which doesn't fit in with the logic of the position. Instead of this mysterious rook move, White could play either the

energetic 18.b4, or 18.♗g5 followed by ♕h4, exploiting the weakness of Black's kingside and her lagging development.

18...♗b7 19.♗g5

Here I had planned to continue 19.d4 ♗xd4 20.♘xd4 exd4 21.e5 dxe5? 22.♖xe5+ ♔d8 23.♗g5 – except that Black could simply castle on move 21. So I had to acknowledge that my previous move was a mistake, and to continue playing positionally.

19...0-0-0 20.♕h4 ♕e7 21.♖e2 ♖h8



22.♘d1!?

At the time, this was my favorite knight route (through d1 to the center), and it often made my trainers scratch their heads. Since the position is closed in nature, with no clear plan for Black, White can even allow herself to play in this style.

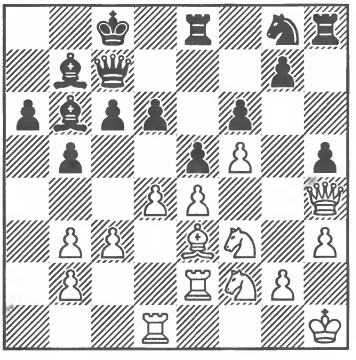
22...♖de8 23.c3 ♗b6 24.♘f2 ♕d7 25.♖d1

Of course I did not seriously consider the continuation 25.♗xf6 gxf6 26.♕xf6?? ♗d8 27.♕g7 ♖eg8, when the white queen would be trapped.

25...♘g8 26.d4

White has carried out her plan of breaking in the center. With Black's pieces coordinating poorly, White has an indisputable advantage. Perhaps my opponent should have played ...exd4, on this or the next move. At least then her bishops might have tried to have some say in the game.

26...f6 27.♗e3 ♕c7



28.dxe5!

After this exchange, White breaks into her opponent's position along the open d-file, and Black is hard-pressed to stop her.

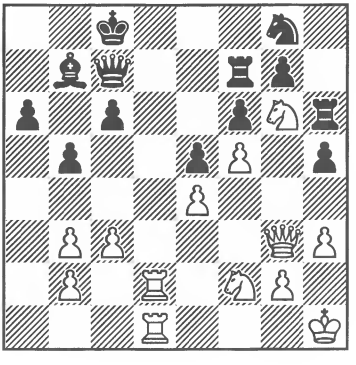
28...dxe5

Black simply cannot recapture with the other pawn: 28...fxe5 29.♗xb6 ♕xb6 30.♖xd6.

29.♗xb6 ♕xb6 30.♕g3 ♕c7 31.♖ed2 ♖e7 32.♘h4!

The work of the white knights in this game is simply amazing.

32...♖f7 33.♘g6 ♖h6



34.♘d3!

One knight blockades the black kingside, while the other seeks to perform the same operation on the queenside.

34...♘e7

On 34...c5, White wins by 35.♕f2 c4 36.♘c5, followed by the rook invading at d7 or the knight at e6.

35.♘c5 ♘xg6 36.♘e6

The mate threat at d8 forces Black to give up her queen.

36...♕d7 37.♖xd7 ♖xd7 38.♖xd7 ♔xd7 39.♕d3+

Black resigned.

You can imagine what a state I was in for the match against Russia-2. I wanted very much to show that, in this Olympiad, I could also have played for the Russian Junior Team.

No. 6 Dutch Defense A87

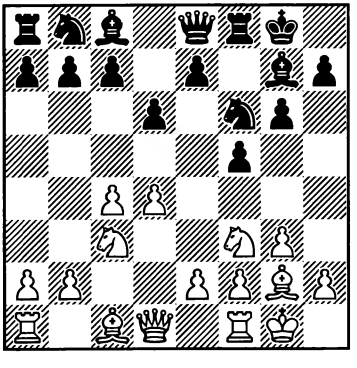
E. Ovod – A. Kosteniuk

Elista 1998

1.♘f3 f5

The Dutch Defense was my main opening with Black from 1997 to 2000.

2.d4 ♘f6 3.g3 g6 4.♗g2 ♗g7 5.0-0 d6 6.c4 0-0 7.♘c3 ♕e8



The Leningrad System attracted me because of the transparency of its plans. The main idea of this system for Black is to push through ...e7-e5. If White prevents this by d4-d5, then Black has the plan of advancing her kingside pawns, as well as developing the knight with ...a7-a5 and ...♘b8-a6-c5, and breaking in the center by ...♗d7 followed by ...c7-c6 or ...b7-b5.

8.d5 a5 9.♕c2

White's main continuations in this position are 9.♘d4, 9.♗e3, and 9.♖b1. White can try playing e2-e4, attempting to open the e-file and make use of the fact that her pawn at d5 and knight at d4 blockade Black's center. Another plan is to start playing on the queenside, trying to advance her pawns to a3 and b4 to drive the black knight away from c5. Or White could simply develop, keeping in mind that either advance by Black, to e5 or to c5, will result in opening up the position, which particularly favors the light-squared bishop on g2. In this game, White decided to pursue a third course: the centralized development of her pieces.

9...♘a6 10.♗e3 ♗d7 11.♖ad1 c5!?

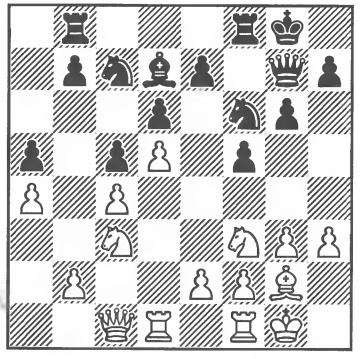
During the game I was quite proud of this move, which lends even more power to the ...b7-b5 break. Black closes the center, rids herself of the potentially weak pawn at c7, and restricts White's play on the queenside. After this move, it becomes obvious that Black has gotten the better of the pawn duel on the queenside.

12.h3 ♖b8 13.♕c1 ♘c7 14.♗h6 ♕f7

This would have been a good time to play ...b7-b5.

15.♗xg7 ♕xg7 16.a4

After this, all Black's preparations on the queenside turned out to have been wasted, forcing me to look for a different plan.



16...♘e4!

Switching to play in the center. The tactical justification of this move is that after the exchange on e4, the a4-pawn is left unprotected.

17.♘b5 ♘xb5 18.axb5 ♖f7 19.♘d2 ♖bf8 20.♘xe4 fxe4 21.♗xe4?

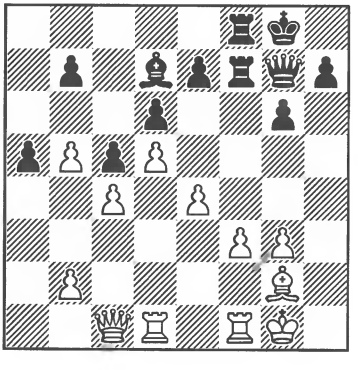
This exchange was not a good idea for White. After 21.b3 ♕e5 22.♕e3, the position would have been equal.

21...♗xh3 22.♗g2 ♗g4

Black's bishop is much more active than its white counterpart, so of course there was no point in trading it.

23.f3 ♗d7 24.e4?

Forgetting one of the basic strategic principles of chess – never stir up trouble where you're weaker. After this move, I can't see any way for White to protect her pawns at g3 and f3.

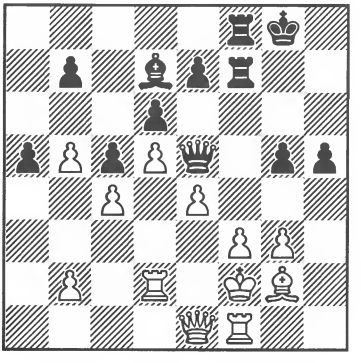


24...g5 25.♖d2

The computer tenaciously continues the fight with 25.♖d3 ♕e5 26.♕c3 ♕xg3 27.f4 ♕h4 28.f5. Of course, White has temporarily closed off the king's wing, and Black probably will not be able to organize a direct attack against the king. But the passed g- and h-pawns must eventually tip the scales in Black's favor.

25...♕e5 26.♕e1 h5 27.♔f2?

Unwilling to submit to the inevitable – or perhaps just frightened to death – the white monarch sets off on a ride to the center of the board.



27...h4 28.gxh4 g4

White's king will find no peace in the center – on the contrary, he comes under the crossfire of all the black pieces.

29.♔e3 gxf3 30.♗xf3 ♗g4 31.♗g2 ♖xf1 32.♗xf1 ♖f3+ 33.♔e2 ♕xe4+

White resigned.

Thanks to this victory, the Kalmyk team was able to defeat Russia-2, demonstrating once again that in team competitions, the ratings and titles of the players are not what's most important.

After my successful Olympiad in Elista, I took part in my last Junior World Championship – this one in rapid

chess. It was impossible to resist a trip to Disneyland – after all, 14 years old is still a kid! In addition, my experience at the 1996 Championship had shown me that in Disneyland, everything would be at the highest level, and also that we would not only be able to play chess, but also to visit the attractions. As it turned out, my sister Oxana was also on the Russian team for the World Under-12 Championships, having qualified for the tournament by performing well in the Russian Rapid Championships. It was also decided to appoint my father the manager of our delegation, since he would have traveled with us in any case.

The trip to Disneyland did not disappoint us: everything was, if that was possible, even better organized than it had been in 1996. As I discovered many years later, at this exact moment, France was undergoing one of its periodic strikes, and there were very few people at Disneyland. So we were able to cover every attraction, from front to back; while the gold medal for the Under-14 Rapid Chess World Championship, which I acquired almost as an afterthought, served as a welcome addition to the whole trip.

Paris, 1998: The Kosteniuk sisters meet Pluto in Disneyland

Chapter 3
School Days

The first part of 1999 was not easy for me. My parents decided that I would be better off being homeschooled, as it had become difficult to coordinate my studies with my frequent trips to competitions. In January, I played in the Wijk aan Zee open tournament; in April – in Bled. I spent all the rest of my time studying hard for my high-school graduation exams. Having skipped two grades, as soon as I passed my graduation exams in May at age 15 I sent in my papers to the Russian State Academy of Physical Education (RGAFK).

Not surprisingly, under this kind of intense academic pressure I did poorly in the Russian Women's Championship at Serpukhov. But that summer, after passing the high-school graduation exams and my college admission tests, I was finally able to breathe freely. I entered a strong women's round-robin tournament at Dresden, and easily took first place.

In the fall, I started my studies at RGAFK. This institute (which now bears the title of university) is the largest institution of higher learning for physical education and sport in Russia and in the

At the RGAFK Chess Department

world. Here, many Olympic champions and prizewinners in the championships of the world and of Europe have studied, in many different kinds of sport. The institute consists of 43 departments, among them a chess department. My freshman class was a notable one: among its members were future International Grandmasters Alexander Grischuk, Vladimir Potkin, Vladimir Dobrov, Alexey Khruschev, and Irina Zakurdjaeva – probably the strongest class in department history!

Actually, I began attending this institute a long time before I actually enrolled in it, having regularly competed in the student round-robins. I even made my third and final candidate-master norm at the age of 12 within the institute's walls, playing in the student championship of Moscow. So the question of where I would go to college was settled long before I finished grade school. RGAFK is just a 20-minute walk from my home – right next door, by Moscow standards. It was at the institute that I came to understand the necessity of participating in sports. From 2000 on, I have been a frequent guest of the institute's track & field arena, and the alleys of Lilac Boulevard became my jogging track. Today, I still pay a lot of attention to my physical preparation, and try to start each day with a run – although giving birth to a daughter has made all of that much more difficult.

I would like to say a few words in particular about the head of the chess department, Evgeny Linovitsky – a retired major-general in the Strategic Missile Command, a great fan of chess, and a strong correspondence player. The RGAFK chess department owes a great deal to Evgeny Pavlovich. It often happens that something depends entirely on one person, upon his energy and devotion; for the chess department, that person has been Evgeny.

Another great advantage of attending the institute was the possibility of combining trips to tournaments with my studies – and, sometimes, just playing in the department itself. For example, right after I enrolled in the department, they put on a Category IV round-robin event, in which I started badly (1.5/4); but by finishing with 7 out of 7, not only did I share first and second places, but I also earned a men's International Master norm.

In October 1999, I competed in the Isle of Man open tournament, where I scored my first victory over a grandmaster – Sergey Kudrin. Since I had not had any wins over men grandmasters in a long time, this game may have helped overcome that psychological barrier.

No. 7 Sicilian Defense B53
A.Kosteniuk – S. Kudrin
Port Erin 1999

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.♗b5+

In 1998 and 1999, I would often play ♗b5 when I had White against the Sicilian. Even today, sometimes I still play this line. The main idea behind the ♗b5 variations is to avoid the sharp Sicilian main lines. By playing ♗b5, White often reaches positions where her advantage is minimal; on the other hand, she runs no risk of losing, as often happens, for example, in the Najdorf Variation.

3...♘c6

All three of Black's replies – ...♘c6, ...♗d7, and ...♘d7 – are feasible here. The move chosen by Black in this game is one that I frequently prefer myself when I play on that side of this variation. It usually leads to positions featuring a slow maneuvering type of game, where Black has the same chances of winning as White.

4.d4 cxd4 5.♕xd4 ♗d7 6.♗xc6 ♗xc6 7.c4 ♘f6

Here Black should seriously consider 7...f5!? in order to prevent White from setting up the formation she wants in the 4.d4 variation, namely pawns at e4 and c4. Additionally, this allows Black to immediately open the game for his trump card – the bishop on c6. And after 8.♘c3 (or 8.exf5 ♕a5+ 9.♘c3 ♕xf5 10.♘d5 ♖c8 11.0-0 ♘f6 12.♖d1 e6) 8...fxe4 9.♘g5 (9.♘xe4 ♘f6 10.♘xf6+ gxf6 11.♕g4 ♕d7 12.♕h5+ ♔d8 13.0-0 ♖g8 14.h3 ♕e6 15.♗f4 ♕xc4 16.♗g3 ♕c5 17.♕h4 ♗xf3 18.gxf3 ♖g5 19.♔g2 ♖h5 20.♕a4 ♖b8 21.♕a3 a6 22.♖fe1 ♖c8 23.♖e4 ♖e5 24.♖ae1 ♖d5 25.♕e3, and White resigned, An. Bykhovsky-Sax, Mariehamn 1997) 9... e5 10.♕e3 ♘f6 11.0-0 ♗e7 12.♘gxe4 ♘xe4 13.♘xe4 0-0, Black succeeds in completing his development, reaching a position where he retains the two bishops.

8.♘c3 g6 9.0-0 ♗g7 10.♕d3 ♘d7

10...0-0 is more often played, when, after 11.♘d4, Black tries to exploit the slight vulnerability of White's center pawns and the advantage of his two bishops, while White stakes her hopes on a small space advantage.

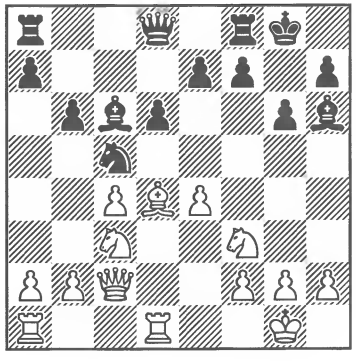
11.♗e3 ♘c5 12.♕c2 0-0 13.♗d4

White would have done better to put her knight on d4, in order to force the black bishop away from c6, and also to clear the way for her f-pawn. After the text, Black once again has the chance to play ...f7-f5.

13...♗h6

13...f5!? 14.♗xg7 ♔xg7 15.♘d2 ♘xe4 16.♘dxe4 fxe4 17.♘xe4 ♕a5, with good counterplay for Black, was worth considering.

14.♖fd1 b6



15.♘d5

Here White had an interesting tactical shot, which might not have brought any concrete dividends, but which might still have frightened my opponent: 15.♘e5!? ♗b7 (15...dxe5 16.♗e3 ♕c7 17.♗xh6 would not be a good idea) 16.♘g4 ♗g7 17.♗xg7 ♔xg7 18.b4, and White has the initiative.

15...♖c8 16.a4 ♘d7 17.b3

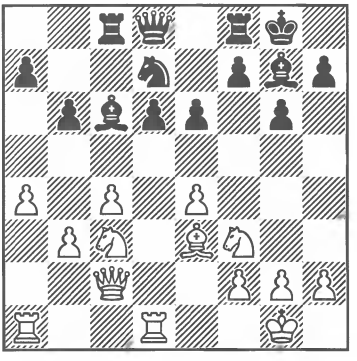
What was probably going on here was that I had gotten the rather primitive idea of checkmating my opponent after ♗b2 and ♕c3. Because no matter how much time you may spend thinking about the strategic principles of chess, the main idea always remains to mate the enemy king!

17.♕e2!? was worth considering, so that after ...e7-e6, White's knight could quietly return to c3.

17...e6 18.♗e3

Here after 18.♘c3 e5 19.♗e3 ♗xe3 20.fxe3, Black has somewhat weakened my pawn structure.

18...♗g7 19.♘c3



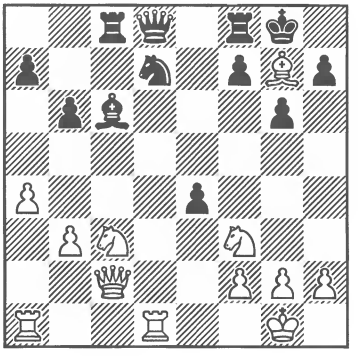
19...d5!?

A standard technique in this kind of position. Black not only rids himself of the weak pawn at d6, which always needed protection, but also opens the c-file, setting up a threat against the knight at c3.

20.cxd5 exd5 21.♗d4

I could have tested Black by playing 21.exd5!? ♗xc3 (21...♗xd5? is bad because of 22.♖xd5 ♖xc3 23.♕d1 ♖c7 24.♖c1, and White has traded off his pinned c3-knight, while Black will now find it hard to get out of the pin) 22.♗g5 f6 23.dxc6 ♖xc6 24.♗e3 (24.♖ac1 fxg5 25.♕d3 is also possible) 24...♕c7 25.♖ac1 ♖c8. Because of the black bishop's rather inferior location, White could expect to hold a slight advantage here.

21...dxe4 22.♗xg7

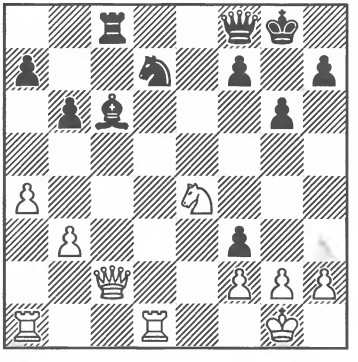


22...exf3?

It appears my opponent overestimated his position a bit, and decided that the moment had come to switch to the counterattack. After 22...♔xg7 23.♘xe4 ♗xe4 24.♕xe4 ♕c7, the players would most likely have soon agreed to a draw.

23.♗xf8 ♕xf8 24.♘e4!

A pinned knight is not always completely tied down! It turns out that Black has no way to exploit the *vis-à-vis* between his rook and White's queen.



24...♕e7?

24...♘e5 (threatening ...fxg2+ and ...♘f3+) was stronger, with an unclear game. After White's knight reaches d6, Black's position gets much worse.

25.♘d6 ♕g5 26.g3 ♕g4 27.♕c4 ♕xc4

Black cannot keep the queens on the board: after 27...♕h3, White plays 28.♕f1.

28.♘xc4

After the queen trade, White's simply up the exchange.

28...♘c5 29.b4 ♘xa4 30.♘d6 ♖c7 31.♖dc1 b5

There's no longer a good defense against the threats of b4-b5 or ♖xa4. Upon re-examining this game, once again I am reminded of the words of the 7th World Champion, Vassily Smyslov: "Checks, forks, and pins are the basic tactical weapons in chess."

32.♘xb5 ♗xb5 33.♖xc7

The rest of the game is just unwillingness to accept the inevitable.

33...a6 34.♖a3 ♘b6 35.♖xf3 ♘d5 36.♖cxf7 ♘xb4 37.♖f8+ ♔g7 38.♖3f7+ ♔h6 39.♖h8

Black resigned.

In November 1999, during my studies at the Young Journalists' School, which I continued to attend with Oxana, I wrote the following poem:

TALK TO ME, SO I CAN SEE YOU

Talk to me, so I can see you,
So the sun will shine
more brightly,
So that later on, I won't regret
Not having enough time
to tell you
Of the quiet rustle of the leaves,
Of the morning dewdrops,
glistening on the grass,
Of the strong spring breeze,
Of the cloudless February skies,
Of the happiness that
comes with the dawn,
And the sunrise –
first lilac, then reddening.
What sort of happiness?
Happiness... Happiness...
I could say a lot about that.
One of these days, suddenly,
it will come,
And the world will change
before your eyes.
It will come in the middle
of a great big fairytale,
Blanketed by a soft, rosy spring.
And in that spring, which will come,
so suddenly,
With a loud laugh
you'll pour out your love,
And scatter cherry roses
upon the snow,
Kindling a burning fire
in our hearts.
Talk to me, so I can see you
And keep forever
this disturbing passion,
Like a freshening gust of wind,
A gust of love, fantasies,
and hopes.

11/26/1999

In January 2000, I played once again in the open tournament at Wijk aan Zee.

Once Dad understood that for my chess career to continue, I would have to start working with a strong player, he began to look for a trainer for me. From 1997 to 2000, I tried working with several specialists; but the search for a good trainer is a very important and complex task. Some of the trainers wanted a lot of money, some were not a good personality fit, and with some, their work did not suit us. In February

2000, I began to work with grandmaster Alexey Korotylev, with whom I worked and continued to develop regularly for 8 years. It was Alexey who explained to me why I needed to study the chess classics; for the entire course of our work, he tried scrupulously to eliminate the holes in my chess education.

Sometimes I am asked: What does chess training look like? How many hours must a player spend each day in order to reach a high level? Keep in mind that, for a chessplayer, the concept of a "normal working day" does not exist. We are free artists. Sometimes, I can sit for hours at a chessboard; other times, I may not take out the pieces at all. Still, when a player has just begun to take the game seriously, it's very important that the training be regular in nature. Beginning players must strive to work on chess not less than two hours every day.

As the player's strength increases, so does the time he or she needs to devote to chess. Today's professionals must work not less than 7-8 hours a day on chess. And I stress the word "work" – a concept that does not include endless sessions of games played on the Internet. What I have in mind is the analysis and examination of one's own games and those of strong grandmasters, solving positions, reading chess literature, and working on one's opening repertoire.

As my own experience shows, the hardest thing is to force oneself to keep busy, to overcome one's laziness and sit down at the chessboard. Still, nowadays, when we always have a strong sparring partner – the computer – handy, plus an enormous amount of amazing chess

With my coach, GM Alexey Korotylev

literature, working by oneself has become easier. Today's young players read less and less, and would have trouble remembering the names (to say nothing of the games) of the world chess champions. I believe that trainers need to pay particular attention to making sure that their young students start at the earliest possible age to study the games from the chess classics, to learn to read chess literature. Because a classical chess foundation needs to start being laid down at the earliest possible age.

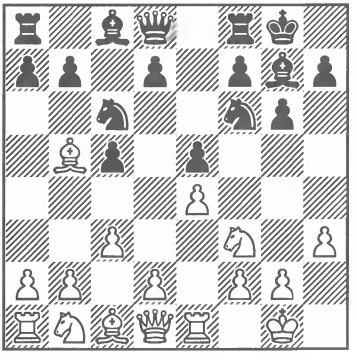
Along with my tournaments, I continued studying at the institute in 2000 and playing regularly in the blitz events. In Moscow, as my dad loved to say, one might become a grandmaster while never making it past the Beltway Road. So I got enough tournament practice. In March, I played in the Geller Memorial in Moscow; and in early May, I traveled to my beloved Elista for the next Russian Women's Championship. After the 1998 Olympiad, I added the Kalmyk capital to my list of lucky cities, which also includes Dresden and Moscow and later came to include Mainz and Nalchik.

After my 3.5/9 result at the 1999 Russian Championship, I really wanted to score better at my next adult national championship. In those days, the national championship also selected for the European championship, which unquestionably raised the prestige of the Russian championship and of the European as well.

No. 8 Sicilian Defense B31
I. Kryukova – A. Kosteniuk
Elista 2000

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 g6 4.0-0 ♗g7 5.c3 ♘f6 6.♖e1 0-0 7.h3 e5

During these years, I used to travel to tournaments with my volumes of *ECO*, and this variation was studied deeply in Volume B (Semi-Open Games). Obviously, the play here is mainly in the center. The breaks with d2-d4 and ...d7-d5 will be the main ideas for the two sides in this position. Black's last move hinders both of the advances e4-e5 and d2-d4, and restricts White's possibilities in the center. The main point is that after ...e7-e5, Black will not lose the center pawn, since it would not be good for White to take on e5: 8.♗xc6 dxc6 9.♘xe5 ♖e8 10.f4 (10.d4 cxd4 11.cxd4 ♘xe4!) 10... ♘h5 11.d4 ♕h4 12.♖f1 ♗xh3 13.gxh3 ♕g3+ 14.♔h1 ♕xh3+ 15.♔g1 ♘g3, with a dangerous initiative for Black (Galdunts-Dreev, St. Petersburg 1993).



8.d4

As I noted previously, in these years 3.♗b5 was my universal weapon against the Sicilian Defense (after 2...d6 or 2...♘c6), so I had had this position with both colors already. Playing White, I would usually continue d2-d3, transposing to Ruy López structures (8.d3 d6 9.♘bd2, etc.).

8...cxd4 9.cxd4 exd4 10.♘xd4?!

10.e5 ♘d5 11.♗g5 ♕c7 12.♕b3 was better, with a complex game (White

should not be in a hurry to take the pawn: after 12.♗xc6 dxc6 13.♕xd4 h6 14.♗h4 ♕b6, Black's position is already a bit more comfortable).

10...♕b6

10...♖e8 11.♘xc6 (11.♗g5?! h6 would be bad for White) 11...bxc6!? 12.♗d3 d5 13.exd5 ♖xe1+ 14.♕xe1 ♘xd5 15.♘a3 ♖b8 was worth considering: the strong position of Black's pieces compensates for the weakness on c6, giving Black a little better game.

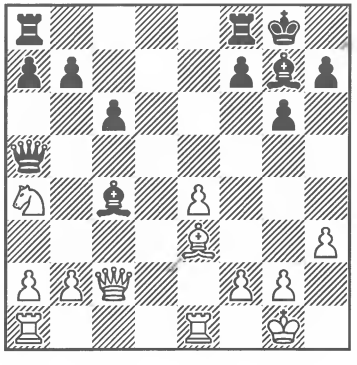
11.♘xc6 dxc6 12.♗d3 ♗e6 13.♘c3 ♘d7!

Black repositions the knight to a central location.

14.♕c2 ♘e5 15.♗e3 ♕a5 16.♗f1 ♘c4

Attacking the bishop, while simultaneously creating the threat of ...♘xb2. White certainly doesn't want to retreat the bishop back to c1, besides which after 17.♗c1 ♘a3! 18.♕e2 ♗c4 19.♕f3 b5, Black develops a dangerous queenside initiative. Thus, White has to give up one of her bishops.

17.♗xc4 ♗xc4 18.♘a4



18...♗d3!

As the classics used to say, "The advantage of the two bishops consists of the fact that sometimes, at the right moment, one of them may be traded off!"

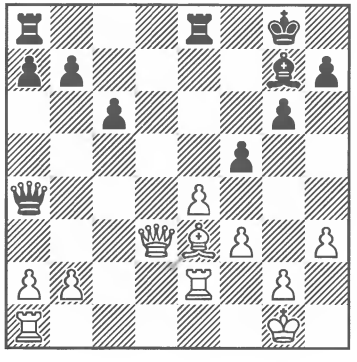
19.♕xd3 ♕xa4 20.♖e2

Accepting a defensive posture. White should still probably have tried to fight for the initiative and seize the d-file by 20.♖ed1, although here too, after 20...♖fe8 21.f3 ♗xb2 22.♖ab1, and the accurate 22...♗f6! (but not 22...♗g7?! 23.♖xb7 ♕xa2 24.♖d2 ♕a1+ 25.♔f2, when Black suddenly has problems defending the seventh rank) 23.♖xb7 ♖ad8! 24.♖d7 ♖xd7 25.♕xd7 ♖d8 26.♕xd8+ ♗xd8 27.♖xd8+ ♔g7 28.♗d4+ ♔h6 29.♗e3+ ♔h5 30.♖h8 g5, Black would have good winning chances.

20...♖fe8 21.f3

On 21.♗g5, Black gets the better of it with 21...h6 22.♗h4 g5 23.♗g3 ♖ad8 24.♕f3 ♖d1+ 25.♖xd1 ♕xd1+ 26.♔h2 f5! 27.♗c7 ♖xe4 28.♖xe4 ♕xf3 29.gxf3 fxe4 30.fxe4 ♗xb2.

21...f5



22.exf5?

The decisive mistake. White should have fought for the d-file with 22.♖d1 or 22.♗g5.

22...♖ad8 23.♕b3+ ♕xb3 24.axb3 gxf5

I could also have played 24...♖d3 25.♖ae1 ♖exe3 26.♖xe3 ♗d4 27.♔f2 gxf5 28.f4 ♖xb3 29.♔f3 ♗xe3 30.♖xe3 ♖xb2, and although rook endings are notorious for their drawish tendencies, Black's three connected passed pawns should get through.

25.♔f2 ♖d3 26.♗xa7 ♖xe2+ 27.♔xe2 ♖xb3 28.♖d1 ♖xb2+ 29.♔f1 ♗e1

Two connected passed pawns will certainly decide the game soon.

30.♖d7 b5 31.♖e7 ♗g3 32.♖e8+ ♔f7 33.♖h8 b4 34.♖xh7+ ♔e6

White has restored material equality, but her situation has not improved: her pieces are poorly coordinated, her king remains cut off at the edge of the board, and Black's passed pawns will reach the first rank almost unimpeded.

35.♖h6+ ♔d5 36.♖f6 f4 37.♖f8 b3 38.♖b8 ♔c4 39.♖c8 ♖b1+

Another way was 39...♖c2 40.♖xc6+ ♔d5 41.♖b6 b2, and wins.

40.♔e2 ♖e1+ 41.♔d2 b2 42.♖xc6+ ♔d5

White resigned.

By scoring 6 out of 9 in this Championship, I took second place (Ekaterina Kovalevskaya became Russian Champion) and made the list of candidates for the 2000 Russian Olympic Team.

At the end of May, another event took place that later turned out to be of great importance in my life. I was invited to give a simultaneous exhibition, on 25 boards, at the International Olympic Museum in Lausanne, and to meet with Juan Antonio Samaranch, at that time president of the International Olympic Committee. This was my first trip to Switzerland; and all through the trip from Geneva to Lausanne, I stared uninterruptedly out

2000 Russian Championship awards ceremony. Left to right: Alexandra Kosteniuk (silver), Vyacheslav Ilyumzhinov, Ekaterina Kovalevskaya (gold), Yulia Golyanina (bronze)

the train window at the quiet beauty of the meadows, drowning in green, and the deep blue of the mountains.

One of the great benefits of being a chess professional is the chance to travel frequently around the world. Until I was 15, I kept a careful record of all the countries and cities I had been able to visit; eventually, however, I had to stop writing down all the new countries on the list. With such a kaleidoscope of travel, only the most memorable cities remain in my memory. Lausanne was a city I fell in love with at once: the view of Lake Geneva, the Alps, and the famous Ouchy lakefront, awash in flowers.

After the simultaneous exhibition at the Olympic Museum, I met Diego, my future husband, who graciously offered to show my father and me around Switzerland. For an entire day, he drove up and down the mountains and valleys of this attractive little country. As it happened, chess had been a childhood pastime of Diego's – he had played until he went off to college. It was chiefly due to chess that he had studied Russian and now knows it so well. After our meeting in Lausanne, seeing that my English was not very good, he suggested to my parents that they send me to England to study the language. So it was that in the summer of 2000, I spent six weeks in Brighton studying English. Now, of course, I understand how valuable this advice was, and would like to point out to my young readers how important it is for them to learn at least one foreign language. The more so, in that it has been shown that studying other subjects which also require the development of memory, is often useful to chessplayers. Because in chess, the most important thing is constantly training your brain!

After my immersion in the English language, and a summer spent without my chess exercises, I had to put considerable effort into reestablishing my usual work schedule. I had several training sessions, but at the World Cup in August 2000, held in the Chinese city of Shenyang, I performed poorly. This was my debut in the arena of international women's chess, and it was a nightmare.

In October 2000, I played once again in the Isle of Man Open; out of this tournament, the only thing worth remembering was my last-round win... over my husband-to-be.

At the close of 2000, once again I was not included in the main Russian team slated to participate in the Olympics at Istanbul; however, knowing what I now know about what a difficult tournament that turned out to be for those teams that were in the running for medals, I'm not too broken up over it any more. The chief benefit from being on the list of reserve players for the team was that I could now go to the training sessions along with the regular team members. These sessions, held regularly from 2000 to 2006, were most valuable to me. I could examine my opening problems, lay out and analyze the variations that interested me. To this day, the work done in those sessions occasionally helps me out at tournaments. The chief team trainer and captain in those years was Yuri Yakovich. It was entirely owing to him that the sessions were at such a high level, that almost the entire team participated, and that frequently the players on the Russian men's team would help us out

by analyzing various opening setups and schemes with the women's team.

Instead of playing in the Istanbul Olympics, I competed very successfully in the strong Chigorin Memorial men's tournament, including the following engrossing encounter with grandmaster Evgeny Vorobiov.

No. 9 Sicilian Defense B66
E. Vorobiov – A. Kosteniuk
St. Petersburg 2000

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 d6 6.♗g5 e6 7.♕d2 a6 8.0-0-0 h6

The Rauzer system became my first Sicilian Defense variation. After many years of experimenting with the Scandinavian Defense, I decided the time had come for the more mainline openings. And I decided to begin studying the Sicilian Defense, which I felt was suited to my style. The Najdorf Variation scared me – too many subvariations; the Scheveningen's strategic ideas seemed too complex; and the Dragon was too bullheaded. So my choice fell on the Rauzer Variation, in particular the 8...h6 variant. Later, when White found a sufficiently powerful reply to this system, that being the ♘xc6 and ♗f4 approach, I started looking into other setups. For example, there was the classical system with ...♗e7, against which I often played the White side as well (see, for example, my match against Galliamova at the 2001 World Championship). Or the ...♗d7 variation, which leads to complex, double-edged play, but often involves a spoiled kingside pawn structure after ♗xf6 gxf6, which always made me a little nervous.

Lately, I have turned to a few hybrid variations, playing ...♗e7 and then ...♕b6 with a later transposition into the basic ideas of all Sicilians with opposite-side castling: attacking on the queenside with the advance of the a- and b-pawns, as well

My games with Evgeny Vorobiov have always been hard-fought

as repositioning my pieces (...♖fc8 and ...♘f6-d7-b6-c4), followed by carrying out ...d6-d5. I managed to execute the basic ideas of this system successfully in my game with Antoaneta Stefanova (No. 32) at the 2004 World Chess Olympiad.

9.♘xc6!?

The most unpleasant continuation for Black.

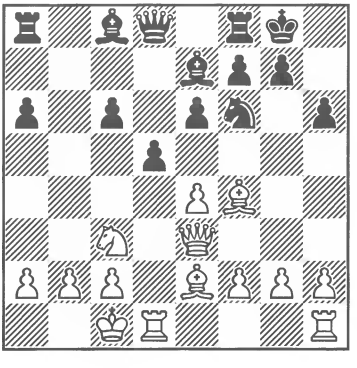
9...bxc6 10.♗f4 d5 11.♕e3 ♗e7

Black has several ways to go here, but in every one of them she will have trouble equalizing.

11...♗b4 12.a3 ♗xc3 13.♕xc3 ♘xe4 14.♕xg7 ♕f6 15.♕xf6 ♘xf6 16.c4, and I was unable to hold this difficult endgame against White's advantage of the two bishops. Goloshchapov-Kosteniuk, Moscow 2002.

11...♕a5 12.♗e2 ♗b4 (12...♕c5 13.♕g3 d4 14.♘a4 ♕b4 15.♕b3 ♕xb3 16.axb3 ♘d7 17.♖xd4 e5 18.♖xd7 ♗xd7 19.♗xe5 ♗e6 20.♖d1 ♗e7 21.♗d6 a5 22.e5 h5 23.♗f3 ♔f8 24.♗xc6 ♖d8 25.c4 ♖h6 26.c5 ♗xb3 27.♖d3 ♗c4 28.♖d4 ♗a6 29.♘b6 ♗xd6 30.exd6, and Black resigned in Balashov-Kiselev, Moscow 2000) 13.♗e5 ♗xc3 14.♗xc3 ♕xa2 15.♗d3 dxe4 16.♕g3 exd3 17.♕xg7 ♖g8 18.♕xf6, and White won in 62 moves: Balashov-Makarov, Smolensk 2000.

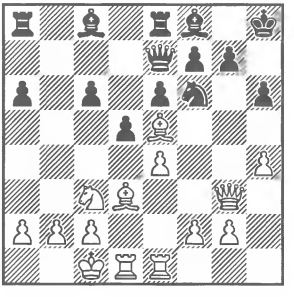
12.♗e2 0-0



13.♕g3

I thought the immediate kingside pawn advance by 13.h4 would have been more dangerous to Black. I tried defending this position for Black, but scored zip out of 2, although in the game against Naiditsch in 2003, I did not lose on account of the opening.

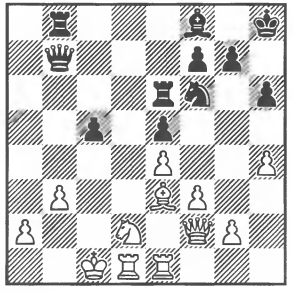
13...♖e8 14.♕g3 (I was most afraid of the plan with 14.g4, for example: 14...♘d7 15.♕g3 e5 16.♗d2 ♘c5 17.g5 d4 18.gxh6 ♗f6 19.hxg7 dxc3 20.♗xc3 ♕e7 21.♕e3, Ziyatdinov-Zabotin, Vladimir 2008, when practice shows that Black has a hard time holding this position) 14...♔h8 15.♗c7 ♕d7 16.♗e5 ♗f8 17.♗d3 (after 17.exd5 cxd5 18.♖d4 ♕e7 in the game Fressinet-Bacrot, Vichy 2000, Black managed to win) 17...♕e7 18.♖he1:



18...d4!? (I was very proud of this pawn sacrifice, which I found at the board. Unfortunately, I was unable to demonstrate the correctness of my idea, despite many opportunities to do so) 19.♗xd4 e5 20.♗e3 ♖b8 21.♘b1 ♕b7 22.b3 a5 23.f3 a4 24.♗c4 ♗e6 25.♗xe6 ♖xe6 26.♕f2 c5 27.♘d2.

Here I had to sacrifice a second pawn with 27...axb3 (I missed this resource during the game, and gradually lost after 27...♕b4 28.♕e2 in Naiditsch-

Kosteniuk, Wijk aan Zee 2003) 28.cxb3 (28.axb3? ♕b4):



28...c4! 29.♘xc4 ♖c6 30.♕c2 ♕c7 31.♖d3 ♘e8, and Black has a very dangerous initiative.

13...♔h8 14.♗c7 ♕d7 15.♗e5 ♘e8

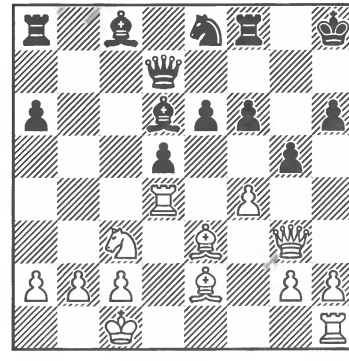
In playing this variation, I was following the game Nisipeanu-Ivanchuk, Las Vegas 1999: 15...♕b7 16.exd5 cxd5 17.♖d4 ♘e8 18.♗d3 ♗f6 19.♖e1 ♗d7 20.♖g4 ♗xe5 21.♖xe5 ♖b8 22.b3 ♖c8 23.♕h4 f5 24.♕e7 ♔g8 25.♖b4 ♕c7 26.♖xe6 ♖f7 27.♘xd5 ♖xe7 28.♘xc7 ♗xe6 29.♘xe6 ♖xe6 30.♗xf5 ♖cc6 31.♗xe6+ ♖xe6, with roughly even chances in the endgame.

It's no secret that chessplayers often do this when they're studying a new opening: they will find a strong player who often uses the variation they're interested in, with good results; and while they familiarize themselves with the basic ideas, they will copy that player's games. As I have already noted (and will write again and again!) in chess, what is new is what is old but thoroughly forgotten. Many ideas have already been demonstrated in the games of strong players; you must simply absorb and memorize these techniques, and attempt to employ them in your own practice.

16.exd5 cxd5 17.♖d4 f6?!

Here, I found an interesting, but very risky idea, involving the advance of my kingside pawns. In those days, for some reason I was fond of advancing pawns in front of my king – g2-g4 or ...g7-g5, for instance. But I should have played 17...♕b7, which transposes back into the aforementioned Nisipeanu-Ivanchuk game.

18.♗f4 g5 19.♗e3 ♗d6 20.f4



20...♘g7

After 20...gxf4, White could sacrifice a piece or the exchange, with compensation either way: 21.♖xf4 ♖g8 22.♕h4 ♗xf4 23.♗xf4; or 21.♗xf4 e5 22.♖xd5 exf4 23.♕h4 ♕g7 24.♖h5 ♔h7 25.g4.

21.♗d3 ♕f7

Of course exchanging pawns and opening the h-file would play into White's hands: 21...♘h5 22.♕h3 ♗xf4 23.♗xf4 ♘xf4 24.♕xh6+ ♔g8 25.h4 ♕g7 26.hxg5 fxg5 27.♕h2, with a dangerous initiative.

22.♕f2

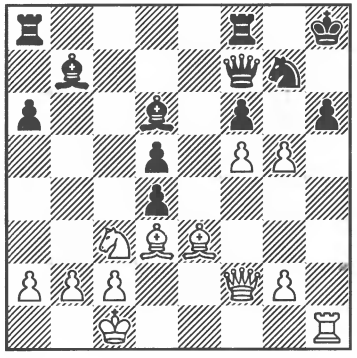
I had intended to meet 22.♕h3 with 22...♕h5.

22...♗b7 23.f5?!

It appears that my opponent was also prone to following sharp ideas, guided by a move's beauty rather than its strength. It was much simpler and stronger to play

23.fxg5 fxg5 24.♕xf7 ♖xf7 25.h4 ♗f4 26.♗xf4 gxf4 27.♖e1, with a blockade on the light squares.

23...e5 24.h4 exd4 25.hxg5

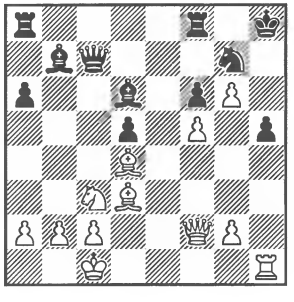


25...h5!

Black cannot take the second minor piece: both 25...dxc3 26.♖xh6+ ♔g8 27.g6 ♕e7 28.♔b1, followed by ♕h4, and 25...dxe3 26.♖xh6+ ♔g8 27.♕h4 lose for me.

26.♗xd4?

Once again, the obvious 26.g6! ♕c7 27.♗xd4 was simpler and stronger, giving White very strong compensation for the sacrificed rook. He would have several dangerous ideas at his disposal: g2-g4, ♕f2-e3-h6, and ♘c3-e2-g3. Black would need to be constantly alert in order to survive this defensive task. I do not have a precise evaluation of this position, but fans of dizzying complications could, I think, analyze it for themselves and find a lot of interesting stuff in there:

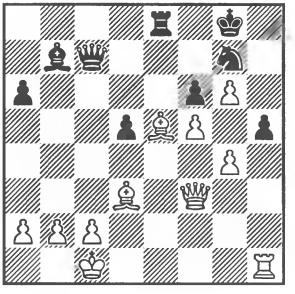


Here's a little food for thought:

1) 27...♗e5? loses to 28.♗xe5 ♕xe5 29.♕d2. One of White's ideas now becomes clear: a queen invasion at h6.

2) 27...♗f4+ 28.♔b1 ♗g5 29.♘e2 (this move is necessary to defend against the unpleasant threat of ...♕f4) 29...a5 (Despite the extra rook, Black is practically devoid of counterplay. The purpose of 29...a5 is to trade off White's strong bishop at d3) 30.g4 ♗a6 31.♗xa6 ♖xa6 32.gxh5 ♖c8 33.♗c3 (covering the c2 square, while clearing the excellent d4 square for the knight) 33...♗h6 34.♘d4 ♕e5 35.♖e1 (35.♗d2 ♘xf5 36.g7+ [36.♘xf5? ♖xc2!] 36...♗xg7 37.h6 ♗f8 does not work, as Black refutes the attack – as long as she avoids 37...♘xd4? 38.♕g2 ♗f8 39.♖g1) 35...♕f4 36.♕xf4 ♗xf4 37.h6 ♘e8 38.♖e7, and White is better here.

3) 27...♔g8 28.♘e2 (by covering f4 against the enemy bishop, White prepares to play ♕e3-h6. 28.g4 does not work because of 28...♗g3) 28...♖ae8 (28...a5? 29.♕e3) 29.g4 ♖xe2! (a forced counter-sacrifice; now Black can breathe again) 30.♕xe2 (30.♗xe2 ♗g3) 30...♖e8 31.♕f3 ♗e5 32.♗xe5, and now, Black can take the bishop with either the rook or the queen – the worst is over:



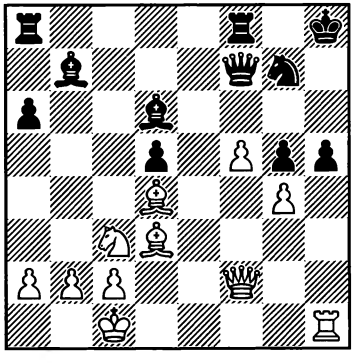
3a) 32...♖xe5 33.♕g3 (33.♖f1 d4 34.♕g3 ♖e7) 33...d4 34.♖g1 (34.♖d1

♖c5) 34...♕e7 (34...♖e7 35.♕xc7 ♖xc7 36.gxh5 ♘xh5 37.♖g4) 35.♖d1 (35.gxh5 ♘xh5 36.♕h4 ♖xf5) 35...hxg4 36.♗c4+ ♔f8 37.♕h2 ♔e8 38.♗f7+ ♔d7 39.♖xd4+ ♔c7 40.♖xg4, with about equal play.

3b) We should also look at the alternative: 32...♕xe5 33.gxh5 ♗c8 34.♖f1 (34.h6 ♘xf5) 34...♘xf5 35.♗xf5 ♗xf5 36.♕xf5 ♕e3+ 37.♔d1 (naturally, the king cannot go to b1, because of the back-rank mate) 37...♕e2+ 38.♔c1 ♕e3+.

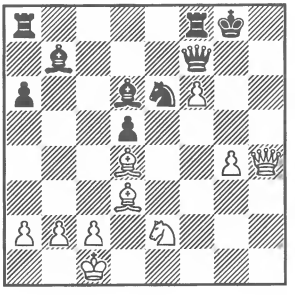
I read something once – I don't remember where – that if a complex variation ends in perpetual check, then it must be correct!

26...fxg5 27.g4



27...♔g8

On 27...h4, I was unable to calculate the variation with the second rook sacrifice at the board: 28.f6 (the immediate 28.♖xh4+ falls short, as 28...gxh4 29.♕xh4+ ♔g8 30.♘e2 ♖fe8 31.f6 ♖e4 32.♗xe4 dxe4 33.fxg7 ♕f1+ 34.♔d2 e3+ 35.♗xe3 ♕h1 beats off the attack) 28...♘e6 29.♖xh4+! (otherwise Black is just a rook ahead) 29...gxh4 30.♕xh4+ ♔g8 31.♘e2:



1) 31...♘xd4 32.♕g5+ ♔h8 33.♕h4+ ♔g8, and once again, it's perpetual check.

2) Black could, of course, try to repel the attack and hang on to her extra material; but White retains enough compensation, for instance: 31...♗c6 32.g5 ♘xd4 33.♘xd4 ♕c7 34.g6 ♖xf6 35.♕xf6 ♖f8 36.♕e6+ ♔g7 37.♕h3 ♗f4+ 38.♔b1 ♕e5 39.♕h7+ ♔f6 40.♕h4+ ♗g5 41.♕f2+ ♔g7 42.♘xc6 ♕xb2+ 43.♔xb2 ♖xf2.

28.♘e2

28.f6 would be met by 28...h4, or if 28.gxh5, then 28...♘xf5.

28...♗c6!?

Intending to trade off White's light-squared bishop. Here, I could already have played 28...h4!?, but that move would not have solved all of Black's problems: 29.f6 (29.♖xh4 gxh4 30.♕xh4 is the same as the 27...h4 variation) 29...♖fe8 30.♖xh4 gxh4 31.♕xh4 leads back into a variation we examined previously under 27...h4.

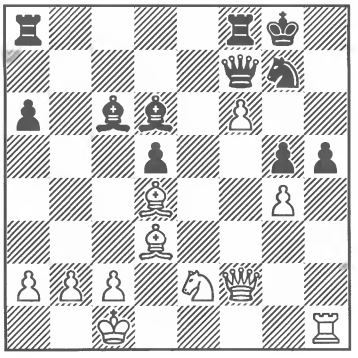
29.f6 *(see diagram on next page)*

29...♗b5?!

29...♗e7!? 30.♖f1 ♗xf6 31.♗xf6 ♘e8 was worth considering, forcing the trade of queens and keeping the extra material.

30.♗xb5?!

After this exchange, Black's task is much easier. White should have



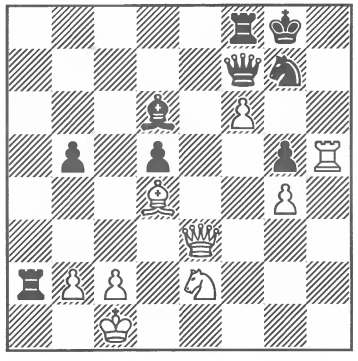
maintained the tension by 30.♗f5!? ♗xe2 (30...♘xf5? 31.♕xf5 would be bad – suddenly, it's White who's winning) 31.fxg7 ♗xg4 32.gxf8♕+ ♖xf8 33.♗xg4 ♕xf2 34.♗e6+ ♕f7 35.♗xf7+ ♔xf7 36.♖xh5. Even though Black has a dangerous passed pawn, White retains every chance of drawing.

30...axb5 31.♕e3 ♖xa2

Even stronger was 31...♖fe8 32.♕d3 (32.♕xg5 ♖xe2 33.gxh5 ♖e4) 32...♖xa2 33.♔d2 ♗b4+ 34.♘c3 h4, with a winning position.

32.♖xh5

White understands that his only chance is to try to confuse his opponent, or he will just be down material. With time pressure looming, White sacrifices his other rook.



32...♖a1+?!

This check only helps White. It would have been much better to take the rook right away: 32...♘xh5 33.♕xg5+ (33.gxh5 ♕xh5, and in this variation, as opposed to the game continuation, the knight on e2 is undefended) 33...♘g7 34.fxg7 ♗f4+ 35.♕xf4 ♕xf4+ 36.♘xf4 ♖xf4 and wins.

33.♔d2 ♘xh5 34.gxh5 ♗b4+?

Distraction. Having almost repelled the attack, I had only to make a few accurate moves – yet for some reason, toward the end of this game, I started opting for cheap checks. I could have won either by 34...♗f4 35.♘xf4 gxf4 36.♕xf4 ♕xh5 37.♕g3+ ♔f7 38.♕g7+ ♔e6 39.♕e7+ ♔f5 40.♕d7+ ♔f4 41.♕d6+ ♔f3 42.♕xf8 ♕h4 43.♔c3 ♖a4, or by 34...♖e8 35.♕xg5+ ♔h7 36.♕f5+ ♔h8 37.♕g6 (37.♕g5 ♖e4) 37...♖xe2+ 38.♔xe2 ♕e6+ 39.♗e3 ♗f8.

35.c3 ♕xh5?!

Once you've lost the thread of a game, it's very difficult to stop, in time pressure, and take a breath. Of course, I should not have given the bishop back just like that. 35...♗d6 36.♕xg5+ ♔h7 37.♕f5+ ♔h8 38.♕g6 (38.♕g5 ♖fa8) 38...♕xg6 39.hxg6 ♔g8 40.f7+ ♖xf7 41.gxf7+ ♔xf7 was better, with excellent winning chances, or 35...♗xc3+ 36.♗xc3 ♕xh5.

36.♕e6+ ♖f7 37.cxb4 ♖a8?!

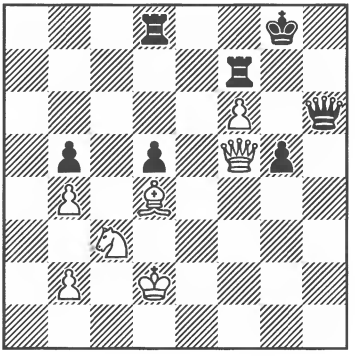
Finally hunkering down into defense. The rook did not need to be moved back from its best position on the first rank, where it creates constant mating threats. 37...g4 was stronger.

38.♘g3 ♕h2+ 39.♘e2 ♕h5 40.♘g3 ♕h2+ 41.♘e2 ♖d8

The time control has been reached, and Black decides to keep playing for

the win. No doubt she has made her task much harder; but still, she is two exchanges ahead.

42.♗e5 ♕f2 43.♗d4 ♕h4 44.♕f5 ♕h6 45.♘c3



45...♖e8?!

In the fifth hour of play, of course it's very hard to keep thinking clearly. It wasn't for nothing that Tal used to begin solving complex problems just at the fifth hour of his training, in order to get used to working under pressure precisely at the end of his games. Here I should have played 45...♖d6. The idea is simple enough: to sacrifice one exchange on f6, and thus make the exploitation of my remaining extra material simpler. For example: 46.♘xd5 (46.♘xb5 ♖dxf6 47.♗xf6 ♕xf6) 46...♖fd7, and Black wins.

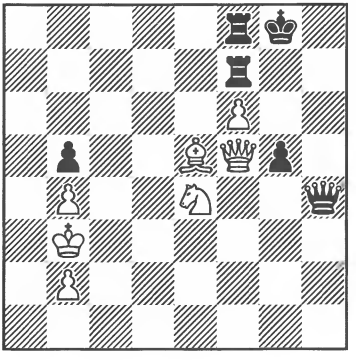
46.♘xd5 ♕h2+

And here, I should have remembered that Black also has a passed pawn: 46...g4+ 47.♘f4 g3 48.♕g4+ ♔h8 49.♕xg3 ♖d8 50.♔c3 ♖xd4 51.♔xd4 ♕xf6+ 52.♔e4 ♕f5+ 53.♔e3 ♕e5+ 54.♔f3 ♕d5+ 55.♔f2 ♕d4+ 56.♔f3 ♕d1+ 57.♔f2 ♕c2+ 58.♔f3 ♕b3+, and wins.

47.♔c3 ♕g3+ 48.♔c2 ♕g2+ 49.♔b3 ♕g3+ 50.♘c3 ♖ef8 51.♗e5

Sensing that Black is making inferior decisions one after another, White is already getting brave enough to think about seizing the initiative. Otherwise, he could simply have taken the draw by perpetual check with 51.♕g6+ ♔h8 52.♕h6+.

51...♕h4 52.♘e4



52...♕h7

52...♖d8!? was worth considering.

53.♕xg5+ ♔h8 54.♘c3 ♕d3 55.♕h4+ ♔g8 56.♕f4?!

White should have taken the draw by 56.♕g5+.

56...♕h3

And here, Black had the interesting resource 56...♖g7!?.

57.♕g5+ ♔h7 58.♗d4 ♕e6+

I decided to force a draw, seeing that I was repeatedly making inferior decisions. After 58...♖d7, I could still have tried to win.

59.♔c2 ♖xf6 60.♗xf6 ♖xf6 61.♕xb5 ♖f2+ 62.♔d3 ♔g6

63.♕d5

Draw.

An absorbing, fighting game. Neither side played flawlessly, but the game was none the less interesting for that. After a good performance in this Chigorin

Conquering the Swiss slopes!

Memorial, I finished 2000 with yet another good performance in the Yugoslav Women's League.

In January 2001, at Diego's invitation, my mother, Alexey Korotylev, and I traveled to an open tournament in Geneva. The games were played in the evening, leaving the mornings free for me to learn downhill skiing. This process of learning the ski trails led to my appearance in Round 5 with a big shiner under one eye and scratches all over my face. But in spite of my skiing accidents, the tournament went well, and I scored 6 out of 9.

In February 2001, I competed in the strong Moscow Open. And right after this tournament, at the invitation of FIDE (which had decided to make me the face of chess), I tried on the new role of photography model. Interestingly, it was right at the time of this photoshoot that designer Olga Feshina, who had designed and created a special line of chess-themed clothing for this project, recommended that I let my hair grow. This was my childhood dream. I had had wonderful hair as a child; but when I began traveling to tournaments with Daddy, and there was no one to braid it, we decided I had to get it cut short. After the photoshoot in February 2001, I decided to change my image, and now hardly anyone remembers that, for a long time, I had short hair.

At first, no one took the pictures from this shoot seriously; but after my success at the World Championship at the end of 2001, they played a large role in my further career. As part of this

First modeling photoshoot. Moscow, February 2001

publicity push by FIDE, I played a match in Cannes, in March 2001 against the French player, Marie Sebag. Marie and I played in special sports outfits, decorated in a chess motif.

I started the match with two losses; but then I pulled myself together and scored $3\frac{1}{2}$ points from the next four rapid games. In the second half of the competition, consisting of 6 blitz games, Marie could not compete with me, and lost 1-5.

In April, I had a serious test – my first European Women's Championship, which was a qualification event for the World Championship. I traveled to the European forum in Warsaw with my trainer, Korotylev. I tried very hard to finish among the charmed circle of those who would qualify for the World Championship, and took 4 draws in the last 4 rounds. Of course, they weren't

Chess-themed outfit, Cannes 2001

pre-arranged; but the very fact that I took four draws in a row was amazing for me at that time. By finishing with 7½ points out of 11, I qualified for the 2001 World Championship.

In May, I traveled once again to Lausanne, where I competed in the annual Young Masters' Tournament, a knockout-style event. Even though I lost to the now well-known Chinese grandmaster Bu Xiangzhi in the first round, he only overcame me in blitz. We played to 1-1 in both the standard time-limit and the rapid games. Having been eliminated from the Young Masters' tournament, I played very well in the open event that ran parallel to it. And I was also very happy to go to Switzerland and see Diego once again.

I often hear the question, "Why do women not play chess as strongly as men?" Having been in chess for so long, I cannot answer precisely for myself. It's very difficult to explain to those who don't play chess themselves that a game of chess creates enormous nervous and physical tension, and, consequently, great expenditures of strength and energy.

The fact that men are physically stronger is a factor that tells in an extended battle. Of course, in contrast to other forms of sport, our physical strength does not play the main role here; thus, women can play against men with increasing success – and they have been doing so in recent years. I believe the main reason there are more men GMs than women GMs is that far fewer girls start playing chess than do boys. For the last two years, I have been holding a children's tournament, the Alexandra Kosteniuk Cup, for children 6-8 years old, and I can see for myself that the ratio of boys to girls is about 70 to 30 percent. If only a few girls start playing chess, then that many fewer will remain in the professional game.

For a talented girl who finds a strong trainer and has the opportunity to work with him starting at the earliest possible age, I see no barrier to her eventually being able to play on an equal footing with men grandmasters. Here I should also note that talent does not simply mean the purely chess abilities nature has given us, but also the ability to work hard, to keep up the drive to win during difficult tournaments, and much else. All this can be found in numbers small enough to count, especially among girls, whose very natures are ill-designed for the waging of constant war against an opponent and against oneself.

Besides enormous effort, working with chess requires financial outlays too, especially during a player's development. You must understand that it's very hard to earn a living at chess – and in children's tournaments there are no cash prizes at all. There are very few who can allow themselves the luxury of playing steadily and training with the finest specialists. Besides the player's individual determination to grow and mature, she must have serious financial support in order to be able to focus on nothing but her chess and her training.

And once a girl decides that it's time for her to start a family, there's no point in even thinking about competing with men, because children take up all of a woman's time and energy. The most she can allow herself after starting her family is the occasional tournament. So my

advice to all girls who dream of playing chess professionally is: "Start working seriously on chess as early as you can." The career of a chessplayer may be long, but the career of a professional woman chessplayer is bound to be a short one.

In the summer of 2001, I traveled to Iran, where I competed in a match-tournament against the Iranian women players. Women's chess is quite popular in Iran, as it is one of the few forms of sport (along with shooting and horseback riding) in which Iranian sportswomen may compete internationally. The match took place in Tehran. I played two games against each of the three strongest Iranian women, and scored $5\frac{1}{2}$ points out of 6. In addition to playing, I was able to visit an Eastern bazaar, which left me with an indelible impression of a whirlwind of sounds, smells, and goods for sale. The bazaar was the first place where I ever bought and tried fresh, uncooked pistachios. After the match was over, we flew to the Iranian city of Isfahan, built on the banks of the river Zahande, 340 kilometers to the south of Tehran. In Isfahan, we passed through the Golden Bazaar, which I remember for the interweaving of the golden reflections and the sun from the gallery of sales booths.

I also found it interesting that the Iranian women were very fond of the pictures from my modeling photoshoot for FIDE, asking continually for the little calendars that featured those photos.

In September 2001, I was scheduled once again to travel to the match between Russia and China. Once again, I didn't make the national women's team; but along with the women's and men's teams, this time they also sent junior teams, consisting of two boys and one girl – and I made this team. After some excellent

Match-tournament with the Iranian women chessplayers, Tehran, August 2001

training camps in suburban Moscow, attended by all three teams – men's, women's and junior – we flew to China.

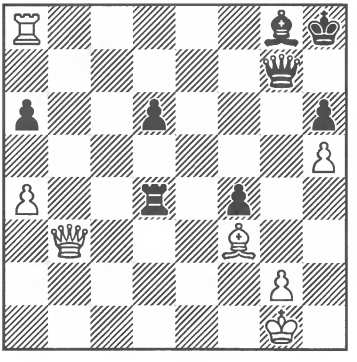
Since the teams were to play each other by the Scheveningen system, my opponents would be two Chinese men, Ni Hua and Bu Xiangzhi (whom I already knew well, thanks to our match in Lausanne) and one woman – Xu Yuanyuan. These annual matches between Russia and China now occupy a special place in our calendar of events. When we played our first match in 2001, the questions stood as follows: Would our women be able to hold against the Chinese women, and by how much would our men's team beat the Chinese? I remember our men were feeling quite optimistic: no one took the Chinese players seriously. And in fact, our men's team did win their match convincingly. But a few years later, not only was our men's team not winning – they often lost matches to the Chinese. What was still more surprising was that the lineups did not undergo any significant changes in the intervening years. This I find very interesting – how did the Chinese get so much stronger in so short a time? Meanwhile, the Chinese women's school of chess has long since ceased to amaze anyone: Chinese women compete successfully in every tournament they enter – especially the team events.

The match was exceptionally well organized. Shanghai simply astonished me. Before this, I had only been to Shenyang, which had left no strong impressions. Traveling to Shanghai, I was prepared to face roughly the same boring landscape. Imagine my surprise upon seeing so many skyscrapers! Once in Shanghai, I learned that this city is the financial and commercial center of China. We were housed in the finest hotel, perched right on the banks of the Huangpu River. After all these impressions, I felt great. Despite the fact that I let two winning positions erode into draws (for example, in my second game with Ni Hua, I failed to see that I could win a rook in one move), I didn't lose even once and scored 4 points out of 6.

No. 10

A.Kosteniuk – Ni Hua

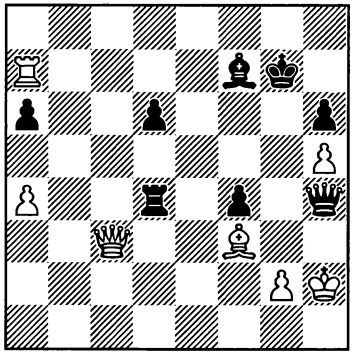
Shanghai 2001



42...♖c4??

An example of mutual blindness. Having put the rook on c4, Black soon noticed that it was *en prise*, and sat in a horrible state of confusion while I was thinking. Our whole team gathered around the table and waited to see whether I would notice his blunder. But I didn't. Only after I wrote down the move I had made on my scoresheet, did I notice that his rook had been under attack – and fled the tournament hall in horror. In the corridor, I got calmed down, and returned to the table. The game ended in a draw after

43.♕d1?? ♖d4 44.♕b3 ♕g3 45.♕c3 ♕g7 46.♖c8 ♕e5 47.♔h2 ♔g7 48.♕c7+ ♔h8 49.♕c3 ♔g7 50.♖a8 ♗c4 51.♕b2 ♕f6 52.♖a7+ ♗f7 53.♕c3 ♕h4+ 54.♔g1 ♕f6 55.♔h2 ♕h4+ 56.♔g1 ♕f6 57.♔h2 ♕h4+



Draw.

The only thing that cast a shadow over the course of the match was the sad events of September 11. When such terrible things start happening in the World, you hope that people will come to their senses and stop killing people who are just like them, and that wars will be fought only over the chessboard.

No. 11 Sicilian Defense B66

Ni Hua – A. Kosteniuk

Shanghai 2001

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 ♘c6 6.♗g5 e6 7.♕d2 a6 8.0-0-0 h6

Again, the Rauzer Variation.

9.♗e3

I annotated the 9.♘xc6 variation in detail in my notes to the game with Vorobiov.

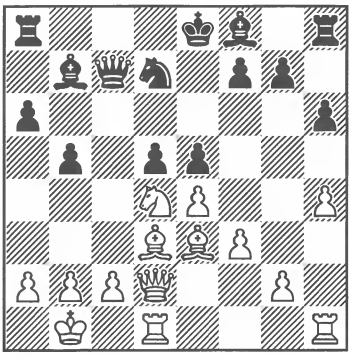
9...♗d7 10.f3 b5 11.♘xc6 ♗xc6 12.♔b1

A useful prophylactic move. White often starts the knight transfer to d4 right away, for example: 12.♘e2 ♕c7 13.♘d4 ♗b7 14.g4 ♘d7 15.♔b1 d5, with an unclear position.

12...♕c7 13.♘e2 ♗b7 14.h4 ♘d7

In this variation, Black strives for central play, but often lags behind in development. If he manages to castle, that usually means all his opening problems are solved. In the following game, for example, Kramnik did not get to castle: 14...♖c8 15.♖h3 h5 16.♘d4 ♘d7 17.♗g5 g6 18.♖h1 d5 19.exd5 ♗xd5 20.♗f4 ♕b7 21.♘b3 ♗g7 22.♗d6 ♕c6 23.♗a3 ♘b6 24.♗d3 ♘c4 25.♗xc4 bxc4 26.♘d4 ♕b6 27.♕g5 ♗f8 28.♗xf8 ♖xf8 29.♖he1 ♖b8 30.b3 ♖d8 31.♘e2 cxb3 32.axb3 ♖d7 33.♔b2 ♕d8 34.♕f4 ♕c7 35.♖xd5 exd5 36.♘d4+, and Black resigned. Kasparov-Kramnik, Frankfurt 1999.

15.♘d4 d5 16.♗d3 e5

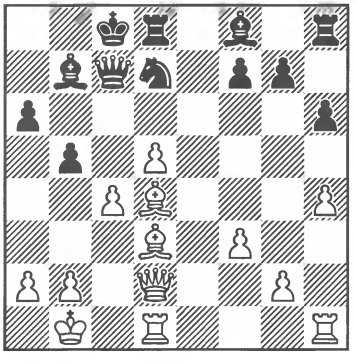


17.exd5!?

An interesting, but risky, decision. Believing that after the knight retreats and Black plays ...d5-d4, Black will have no further problems, White wants to profit from the fact that Black's king is still in the center.

17...exd4 18.♗xd4 0-0-0 19.c4

Of course White must strive to open the position.



19...♘c5

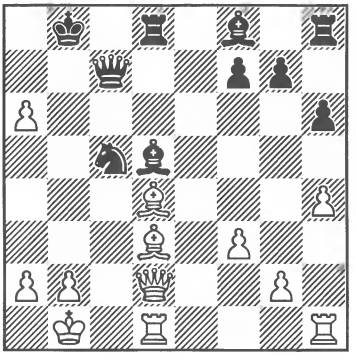
I didn't want to close up the game by 19...b4, fearing that the pawn would be lost on b4, and that the enemy pawn phalanx on the queenside would more than compensate for the sacrificed piece.

20.cxb5 ♔b8

Black could also trade off the bishop at once, but I decided to delay that for a while. It's a well known fact that knights are much more dangerous than bishops in the hands of a woman chessplayer!

20...♘xd3 21.♕xd3 ♕a5 22.♗e5 ♗d6 23.bxa6 ♗xa6 24.♕f5+ ♔b8 leads to an approximately even game.

21.bxa6 ♗xd5



22.♕c3?!

The start of a bad plan – in this position, it should be Black who dreams of being able to exchange queens. 22.b3 ♘xd3 23.♕xd3 ♕a5 24.♖he1, with compensation, was correct.

22...♘xd3 23.♕xc7+?

Of course, White should not have exchanged queens. In the ending, Black no longer has to worry about king safety, while White's pawns become easy targets for my bishop pair.

23...♔xc7 24.♖xd3 ♗e7 25.♖c3+ ♔b8 26.♗xg7 ♖hg8 27.♗xh6

And although, in terms of material, White seems to be perfectly fine (at the moment, he actually has 5 pawns for the piece!), in fact it turns out he has no defense against Black's two powerful bishops plus the initiative.

27...♖xg2 28.♗f4+ ♔a8 29.♖h2

Trying to trade off Black's most active piece.

29...♖xh2 30.♗xh2 ♗xh4

After trading one pair of rooks, White's no better off: Black gradually neutralizes his pieces, recovers all the pawns, and checkmates the opposing king.

31.♗e5 ♔a7 32.a4 ♗e1 33.♖c7+ ♔xa6 34.♔c2 ♗xf3

Now White has only one pawn for the piece; the end is near.

35.b4 f5 36.b5+ ♔b6 37.♖c4 ♖d2+ 38.♔c1 ♖d5 39.♗d4+ ♔b7 40.♗e3 ♖d3

White resigned.

In October 2001, Minsk hosted the European Rapid and Blitz Championships for Women. I placed second in the Rapid event, behind the Armenian player, Danielian. But in the Blitz portion I had no competition, thanks to the Moscow Blitz School and my many years of training in this form of chess! I scored 33½ out of 40. Second was Viktorija Cmilyte, with 29½ points, and third was Tatiana Kosintseva.

No. 12 French Defense C11

A. Kosteniuk – T. Kononenko

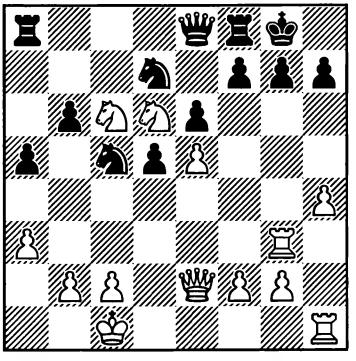
Minsk 2001 (blitz)

1.e4 e6 2.♘f3 d5 3.♘c3

Once again my favorite system appears on the board.

3...♘f6 4.e5 ♘fd7 5.d4 c5 6.dxc5 ♗xc5 7.♗d3 b6?! (7...♘c6 would lead to equality) **8.♕e2 a5?! 9.♗g5 ♗e7 10.♗xe7 ♕xe7 11.0-0-0 ♗a6 12.♘d4 ♗xd3 13.♖xd3 0-0 14.♖g3 ♘a6 15.h4 ♘b4 16.a3 ♘a6 17.♘cb5 ♘ac5 18.♘c6 ♕e8 19.♘d6**

The queen is trapped!



Black resigned.

Holding the European Blitz Cup, Minsk, 2001

Chapter 4
Kremlin Breakthrough

The 2001 World Championship was my first adult world championship competition. I could not say that I expected any kind of huge result. In addition, just a month before the start of this event, I had performed terribly at the Chigorin Memorial in St. Petersburg, scoring just 4 points out of 9.

The Moscow World Championship was the first to be played according to the knockout system. Of course, it's simpler for the World Chess Federation to run a single tournament than it is to organize a whole series of events lasting two years. And there are some sports where the knockout system has done a great job. But after several tries, FIDE gradually came to the conclusion that although knockout championships might appeal to the spectators, a somewhat different system would be necessary in order to determine who might be the strongest woman chessplayer in the world. But what sort of system? No one has a definitive answer to this question, because whichever system you choose, only one woman can become World Champion; there will always be one winner and a loser – and the loser will always complain about the selection system!

A knockout tournament is, first and foremost, a test of the participants' physical and psychological endurance. And it's no surprise that it's frequently either the "dark horses" or the experienced grandmasters who come simply to play chess, who do well at such events.

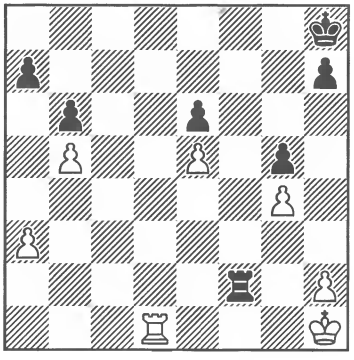
Nevertheless, pulling oneself together for a single tournament is no easy task, either. I was lucky in this regard, because I have that ability to ready myself for concrete events and for the most important games. I might lose a dozen games beforehand that don't mean anything, and on the very next day, against the same opponent, win just one game – but that will be the one that matters.

When the tournament pairings were published, I saw that I would face very strong opposition. In the first round, I played the American Jennifer Shahade. This stage was easy enough – I scored two out of two. In the second round, my opponent was the Vietnamese player (now representing Hungary) Hoang Thanh Trang. She was the current World Under-20 Champion; and as a woman player who had cut her teeth on men's round-robin tournaments of FIDE Category IV and V (that is, with an average rating between 2350 and 2400), she was famously difficult to beat. And in fact, after this Championship, I played Hoang several times in various team events, and every game thereafter has ended in a draw.

In the first game of our match, I had White; after most of the pieces had been traded off, my opponent offered a draw, which I accepted. That evening, before going to bed, I suddenly realized

that I had taken the draw too early, and spent the night before the second game agonizing over my missed chances. Of course, such agonizing would be better saved until after the tournament was over. The ability to forget your unfortunate errors – a common enough occurrence in chess – and to think only of your upcoming games is a most valuable quality for a chessplayer's nervous system.

A.Kosteniuk – Hoang Thanh Trang
Moscow 2001 (m/1)



As often happens, having decided to offer a draw, Black played a move that was not the best.

43...♖e2?

43...♖b2 was better, as then, in order to win the pawns at a7 and b6 without losing all my own queenside pawns, I would have had to let Black's king off the eighth rank: 44.♖d8+ ♔g7 45.♖d7+ ♔g6 46.a4 ♖b4 47.♖xa7 ♖xg4.

So here I should have turned down the offer, and played 44.♖d7 ♖xe5 45.a4, after which Black would have had to play very accurately indeed to hold the draw.

And so, I had Black for the second game.

No. 13 Queen's Gambit – Semi-Slav Defense D47
Hoang Thanh Trang – A. Kosteniuk
Moscow 2001 (m/2)

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 c6

After the Dutch Defense, I switched to Slav and Semi-Slav setups.

4.e3 ♘f6 5.♘c3

Besides transposing into the main lines of the Meran Variation, White could also delay the development of her queen's knight for a bit, and then develop it to d2: 5.♗d3!? ♘bd7 6.♘bd2.

5...♘bd7 6.♗d3 dxc4 7.♗xc4 b5 8.♗e2

The main line in this position is 8.♗d3, where the bishop supports the advance of White's center pawns.

8...a6

Other possible continuations for Black are 8...♗b7 and 8...b4. But regardless of the order of moves, Black's basic plan is to develop her bishop to b7 and break up her opponent's center by playing ...c6-c5. It should also be noted that Black will only take the c4-pawn after White's bishop has moved to either e2 or d3, thereby winning a tempo.

9.0-0

After 9.e4!? b4 10.e5 bxc3 11.exf6 cxb2!? 12.fxg7, we could get four queens: 12...bxa1♕ (12...♗xg7 13.♗xb2, with chances for both sides) 13.gxh8♕, but theory assesses this position as favoring White, who has the safer king. So Black should recapture the pawn at g7 on move 12 with the bishop.

9...c5

Theory considers the main line for Black here to be 9...♗b7 10.e4 c5 11.e5 ♘d5, with an approximately equal game.

But I was not terribly familiar with the nuances of the various moves in this position, so generally I played according to the main ideas. In this position, that would be playing ...c6-c5.

10.d5 ♘b6

After 10...exd5 11.♘xd5 ♗b7 12.♘xf6+ ♕xf6 13.a4 b4 14.e4 h6, Black's somewhat laggard development could cause her problems; but her position has some advantages too, such as the strong bishop at b7.

11.dxe6

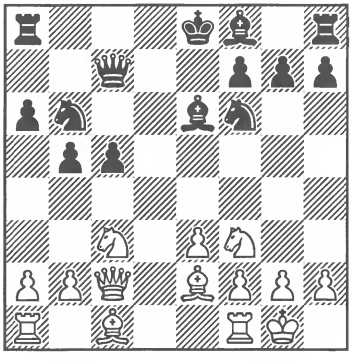
Perhaps White ought to have tried her luck in the endgame: 11.e4 exd5 12.e5 ♘e4 13.♘xe4 dxe4 14.♕xd8+ ♔xd8 15.♘g5 ♗e6 16.♘xe6+ fxe6 17.♗g4 ♔e7 18.♖e1.

11...♗xe6 12.♕c2

After 12.♕xd8+ ♖xd8 13.a4 b4 14.a5 ♘a8 15.♘a4 ♘c7, Black has time to protect all her weaknesses.

12...♕c7?!

12...♗e7!? was better, in order to finish developing as quickly as possible.



13.e4?!

This advance looks quite natural, but now Black has time to complete her development. White had a different continuation at her disposal which would have underscored her opponent's lack of development: 13.♘g5!? ♗d7 14.a4, and if 14...b4?, then 15.a5 bxc3 16.axb6 ♕xb6 17.♗c4! with advantage.

13...♗e7 14.♗g5 0-0

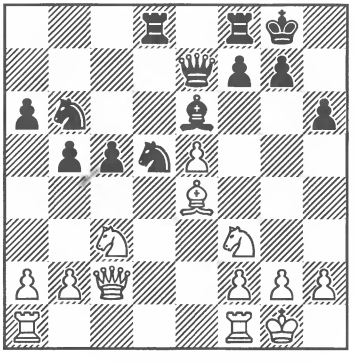
In this position, Black has no problems whatsoever.

15.e5?!

White overestimates her chances and, through inertia, continues to play "actively." Later on, the d5 square proves very useful to Black.

15...♘fd5 16.♗xe7 ♕xe7 17.♗d3 h6 18.♗e4 ♖ad8

Now Black has the upper hand, with a queenside pawn majority, which in turn gives her a concrete plan of advancing her pawn phalanx and creating a passed pawn.



19.♘xd5 ♗xd5 20.♖fd1 ♗xe4 21.♕xe4 ♕e6 22.b3

Of course, advancing pawns on the side where you're weaker is not to be recommended; but with her last move, Black threatened the pawn at a2. The move a2-a3 had its own drawbacks: 22.a3? ♘a4! 23.♕e2 ♕b3, with advantage to Black.

22...♘d5

Once again, the key square d5 helps Black with another reorganization of her pieces.

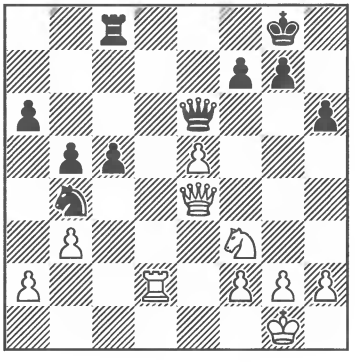
23.♖dc1 ♖c8 24.♖c2 ♖fd8

With her rooks posted on two central files, Black is ready to proceed with the decisive attack. All White's forces will be tied down to the blockade of the c-pawn.

25.♖d1

25.♖ac1 would also have been met by 25...♘b4, when 26.♖xc5? would be bad on account of 26...♖xc5 27.♖xc5 ♖d1+ 28.♘e1 ♘d3.

25...♘b4! 26.♖cd2 ♖xd2 27.♖xd2



27...c4! 28.bxc4

28.♖d6 cxb3! 29.axb3 (29.♖xe6 bxa2 loses) 29...♕xb3 30.g3 would have been more stubborn – even though Black has an extra pawn, White's active pieces would have held out hopes for a draw.

28...♕xc4! 29.♕xc4?

This trade is tantamount to resignation, since the passed pawn, supported by knight and rook, is now unstoppable.

29...bxc4 30.♘e1 c3 31.♖d1 c2 32.♖c1 ♖d8 33.♘xc2 ♘xc2

White's further resistance is based on nothing more than inertia, as resignation meant the end of the tournament for Hoang Thanh Trang.

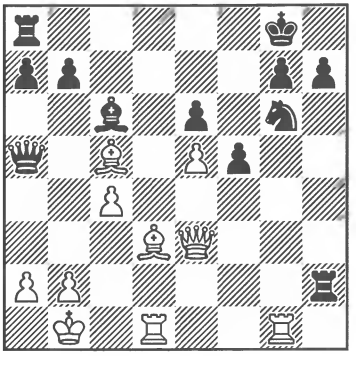
34.♔f1 ♖d2 35.♖b1 a5 36.g3 ♘d4 37.♖b8+ ♔h7 38.♖d8 ♔g6 39.a4 ♘f3 40.♖a8 ♖d5 41.♖a6+ ♔f5 42.♔e2 ♘xe5 43.f4 ♘c4 44.♖c6 ♖d2+ 45.♔f3 ♖d3+ 46.♔e2 ♖e3+ 47.♔f2 ♖c3 48.♖c7 ♘d6 49.♖a7 ♔e4 50.♖xa5 ♖c2+ 51.♔e1 ♖xh2 52.♖e5+ ♔f3 53.♖d5 ♘e4 54.♖d3+ ♔g4 55.♖a3 ♘xg3 56.a5 ♖e2+ 57.♔d1 ♖e7 58.a6 ♖a7

White resigned.

And so I passed through the second round of the World Championship relatively easily. In Round Three I faced Alisa Galliamova. At that time, Alisa was the current Women's World Vice-Champion (in 1999, she had lost the world-championship final match to Xie Jun). It goes without saying that, before the tournament began, I had no expectations of getting past Round Three. The start of the first game of the match with Alisa completely justified my prognosis. Here is the position we reached out of the opening:

A.Kosteniuk – A. Galliamova

Moscow 2001 (m/1)



I had White. Two pawns down, I continued to play only because I didn't

want to be the first one to resign out of the entire tournament hall. But the closer we got to the time control, the stranger things got. I managed not only to save the game, but even to win it.

Understandably, this was a terrible psychological blow for Alisa. The following day, she was unable to regain the point with White, and I won the match 2-0.

In Round Four, I met Almira Skripchenko. Today, Elia and I are the best of friends, our daughters are playmates, and every game we play against each other is now something of a trial. In the world of chess, where you always have to fight, it's very rare to meet somebody who will genuinely root for you and support you no matter what happens. People who play chess often get too deeply involved in the battle over the board; the game's outcome and the places they occupy in the tournament standings become the whole point of their existence. And they will take a loss over the board as a personal insult.

Fortunately, once the clocks are stopped I have always been able to draw a clear line between my games of chess and my personal relationships. Since I ceased playing in junior tournaments at an early age, for a long time I had no friends in the chess world. Children my age continued to play and socialize with one another in junior tournaments, while I did nothing but play against grownups. I was very fortunate that in 2004 I played in the same rapid tournament as Elia in Warsaw. After our game, and being together during the tournament, I saw that Elia was not just a very strong and talented player, but also a very kind and outgoing person, always ready to come to your aid. But in 2001 we didn't know each other yet. Our match followed nearly the same scenario as my previous match against Galliamova. By some miracle, I avoided losing the first game with White, and then scored a relatively easy and convincing win with Black. And here I was, most unexpectedly, in the semi-final of the World Championship!

I imagine that, for all my relatives as well as my trainer, Alexey Korotylev, this was a complete surprise as well. I was only 17 then, and I remember that in the spring of 2001, during the European Championships, the upper limit of my dreams was to achieve qualification to the World Championship. And here I was, just six months later, not just playing in the World Championship, but entering the semi-finals, where I was to face the Chinese Xu Yuhua.

No. 14 Four Knights' Game C47
A.Kosteniuk – Xu Yuhua
Moscow 2001 (m/2)

In the first game of the semi-final, I played Black and lost. So, for the second game, I needed to win in order to keep playing for the title.

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘f6!?

Of course, today it would be strange not to look at Petroff's Defense as one of the possible replies to 1.e4, especially when a draw would mean the same as a win for Black. But in 2001, my analyses were much less inclusive, and I knew a lot less, too. So my opponent's choice of opening left me at a loss. Not knowing which way to go, and having no idea what to do, I decided to steer away from

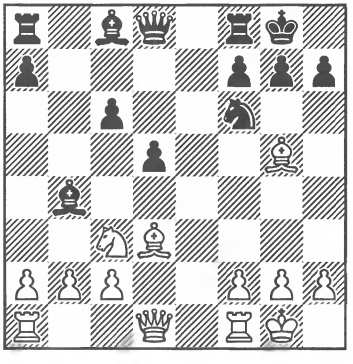
the normal path at once. It was a pretty impulsive decision – the sort of thing I have yet to rid myself of, even today.

3.♘c3 ♘c6 4.d4

This is a completely harmless variation for Black, a line of the Four Knights' Game. 5.♗b5 would have led to more complex play, after which Black has either the symmetrical reply 4...♗b4, or the sharp pawn sacrifice 4...♘d4.

4...exd4 5.♘xd4 ♗b4 6.♘xc6 bxc6 7.♗d3 d5 8.exd5 cxd5 9.0-0 0-0 10.♗g5 c6

At this point my knowledge of theory ended and creativity began. White's play in this position generally consists of attempting to blockade and attack Black's hanging pawns, and also attempting to put together a kingside offensive, banking on her slightly better development. Meanwhile, Black hopes to exploit the mobility of her hanging pawns to turn them from a weakness into an asset.



11.♘e2

I decided to send my knight to the kingside – via d4 (or g3) to f5. This is not a new idea – at the start of the 20th century, Aron Nimzowitsch, the founder of the Hypermodern school and the author of the book, *My System* (which I highly recommend to my readers), played this way in a number of his games. One alternative is 11.♘a4!?, hoping eventually to place the knight on the blockading square c5.

The strongest move here may be 11.♕f3!? ♗e7! (In the ending that arises after 11...h6 12.♗xf6 ♕xf6 13.♕xf6 gxf6 14.♘e2, Black has, in Capablanca's phrase, four pawn islands to White's two. Two bishops are insufficient compensation for the holes in Black's pawn structure, so Black would have to struggle for the draw) 12.h3 (12.♖ae1 h6 13.♗xh6 gxh6 14.♕e3 d4! 15.♕xh6 ♕d6 leads to a draw by repetition) 12...♖b8 13.b3 gives chances for both sides.

11...h6!

Here is one of Nimzowitsch's games, where he was able to realize his plan: 11...♗d6 12.♘d4 ♗d7 13.♕f3 ♗e5 14.♘f5 ♕c7 15.♖ae1 ♖ae8 16.c3 ♗xf5 17.♕xf5 g6 18.♕f3 ♘h5 19.♗h6 ♘g7 20.♔h1 f5 21.♖e2 ♖f7 22.♖fe1 ♖fe7 23.♗g5 ♖e6 24.c4 ♕d6 25.cxd5 cxd5 26.♗b5 ♖b8 27.♗a4 ♗xb2 28.♗b3 ♖b5 29.♖d1 ♗f6 30.♗f4 ♕a6 31.♖xe6 ♘xe6 32.♗xd5 ♕b6 33.♗h6 ♔h8 34.♗xe6 ♕xe6 35.♕a8+ ♕g8 36.♕xa7 ♖b8 37.h3 ♖a8 38.♕b6 ♗e5 39.f4 ♗g7 40.♗xg7+ ♔xg7 41.♖d7+ ♔h6 42.♕f6, and Black resigned (Nimzowitsch-Spielmann, Munich 1905).

12.♗h4 ♗d6 13.♘d4

The knight continues its journey. Meanwhile, White avoids a little trap: 13.c4? ♗xh2+ 14.♔xh2 ♘g4+ 15.♔g3 g5, and Black wins.

13...c5

Of course, 13...♗xh2+ does not work here, because of 14.♔xh2 ♘g4+ 15.♕xg4.

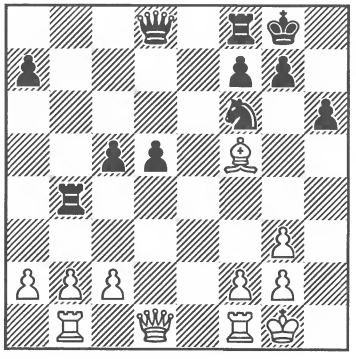
14.♘f5 ♗xf5 15.♗xf5 ♖b8!

Coming out of the opening, Black can only be better here. And if you recall that White absolutely had to win this game in order to stay in the fight for qualification to the final, then it would seem that the match was already decided.

16.♖b1 ♖b4

16...♗e5 was better, with a small advantage for Black.

17.♗g3 ♗xg3 18.hxg3



18...♖e8

18...♕b8 19.b3 ♕e5, bringing the queen to the center and placing the initiative firmly in Black's hands, looks very strong.

19.c3 ♖b7 20.♕a4 ♖e2

20...♖e5!? or 20...♖be7!? deserves consideration.

21.b4 cxb4 22.cxb4 ♖e5?!

Perhaps it was somewhere around here that my opponent weakened and lost her concentration, leading immediately to the improvement of White's position and a sharper game. Even though the position remained equal for a long time, Black had to think constantly about defending her isolated d-pawn. Rather than remove her rook from "gluttony rank," she should have played something like 22...♕b6.

23.♗d3 ♘e4 24.♖bc1 g6 25.♗a6

25.♖c6!? looks good too, with equal chances.

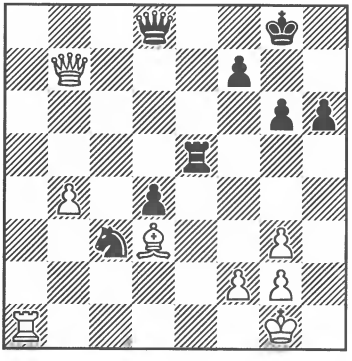
25...♖b8 26.a3 d4 27.♗d3 ♘c3 28.♕xa7 ♖a8 29.♕b7 ♖xa3

Black could have first asked the white queen to decide where it was going, with 29...♖e7 30.♕c6 ♖e6. White, obliged to play for the win, would have had to pull back her queen from its active position.

30.♖a1

But now, the queen on b7 has become quite the headache for Black, who must constantly take various mate threats into consideration.

30...♖xa1 31.♖xa1



31...♕d5??

Strange as it might seem, this move is the decisive mistake. As before, Black could easily hold the position after 31...♔g7 or 31...♕f6. However, lulled by the slow pace of the game, she weakens her back rank for just a moment – enough to give White an irresistible attack.

32.♕b8+ ♔g7 33.♖a5 ♖e1+ 34.♔h2 ♕d7 35.♖a8

Now Black can no longer protect her king.

35...♔f6 36.♕h8+ ♔e7

Black gets most attractively mated after 36...♔g5 37.♖a5+ f5 38.f4+ ♔h5 39.♕f6 ♕e7 40.♖xf5+ gxf5 41.♕xf5+ ♕g5 42.♕h3+ ♕h4 43.g4#.

37.♗xg6!

And since 37...fxg6 allows White to end the game by 38.♕h7+ ♔d6 39.♖a6, Black resigned.

I remember clearly how, after the game ended, I left the Kremlin Hall of Congresses (where they were holding the tournament) and breathed in the frosty December air. Lifting my head, I saw the golden domes of the Kremlin churches, and at that moment, the bells rang out... In a few more hours, I would have to fight through the tiebreaker, to determine who would enter the World Championship final.

Before the second game of the tiebreaker against Xu Yuhua, Alexey Korotylev and I raced through the gigantic Kremlin hall, seeking out anybody who might be able to help us with the particular system of the Najdorf that Xu played (I had managed to win the first tiebreak game). We had no computer with us – quite an amazing circumstance, these days (which probably just goes to show, once again, how inexperienced and unprepared we were then – as does the fact that absolutely no one expected me to be able to play my way back into the final); and my own knowledge was not enough for me to be able to come up with anything new. Even though I was playing for the world title, no one (not even from the Russian Chess Federation, which should have been aiding their own players) asked even once if I could use any help with preparation. Of course, Korotylev did help me during the tournament – but at that time, he himself was only 24. When we approached another grandmaster for assistance, he merely raised his eyebrows in amazement. From one point of view, all this might seem funny; from another, however, it's very sad that a person participating in an event as prestigious as a World Championship should frequently have to rely only on him- or herself, without the opportunity to seek advice from an experienced grandmaster or specialist, who could have been responsible for helping Russian chessplayers.

No. 15 Sicilian Defense B99

A.Kosteniuk – Xu Yuhua

Moscow 2001 (m/4)

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 a6 6.♗g5

Nevertheless, I resolved to stand by my principles.

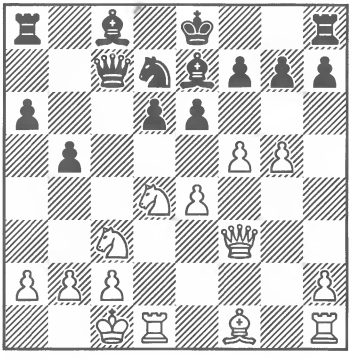
6...e6 7.f4 ♘bd7 8.♕f3 ♕c7 9.0-0-0 ♗e7

Our pregame doubts centered on the variation 9...b5 10.♗d3 ♗b7 11.♖he1 ♗e7 12.♘d5!? – this was the move we had prepared at home for the World Championship, but without coming to any firm conclusion. So in a situation where we were satisfied with a draw, we didn't want to play a sacrificial line. Today, I would probably not have had any problems finding a way to keep a lid on this line of the Najdorf. There is the well-known variation 10.♗xb5!?, for example, when Black can equalize, but only after making several very accurate moves.

10.g4 b5 11.♗xf6 ♘xf6 12.g5 ♘d7

I wasn't afraid of this continuation, since at that time I believed White had a big edge in all lines.

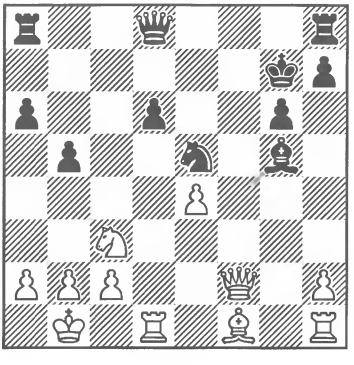
13.f5



13...♗xg5+ 14.♔b1 ♘e5 15.♕h5 ♕d8 16.♘xe6

Here White enjoys a small but stable advantage – an ideal variation for the situation I found myself in.

16...♗xe6 17.fxe6 g6 18.exf7+ ♔xf7 19.♕e2 ♔g7 20.♕f2



20...b4?!

Knowing she had to win the point back, my opponent fails to withstand the pressure. Black would do better to continue 20...♖f8 21.♕d4 ♗f6 22.♕xd6 ♕xd6 23.♖xd6 ♘f3, when White might still go wrong with 24.♘e2 (of course, after 24.♗e2 ♗xc3 25.bxc3 ♘e5, White can only run the risk of not winning) 24...♖ad8 – in this position, Black would have very good compensation for the pawn.

21.♘d5 a5? 22.h4 ♖f8 23.♕g3 ♗h6 24.♗e2 ♖a7 25.h5

To sum up: White has developed her initiative faster than Black. Black's position remains solid enough, but contains no visible counterplay.

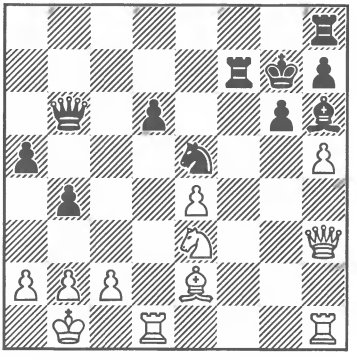
25...♖af7 26.♕h3?!

26.hxg6 hxg6 27.♖h5!? would have been stronger.

26...♖h8?

Here Black could have tried to exchange queens and equalize by 26... ♕d7.

27.♘e3 ♕b6



28.♘c4!

The knight at e5 is the linchpin of Black's entire position. Not surprisingly, after this beauty is exchanged, her position collapses like a house of cards.

28...♘xc4 29.♗xc4 ♖e7 30.hxg6 hxg6 31.♕g3 ♖e5 32.♖df1 ♖e7 33.♖hg1

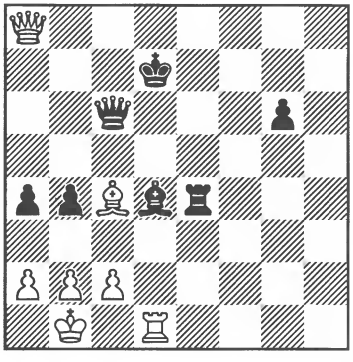
It's well known that opposite-colored bishops render an attack doubly dangerous. In addition, the black king lacks secure pawn protection.

33...d5 34.♗xd5 ♗e3 35.♖h1 ♖xh1 36.♖xh1 ♗d4 37.♕h4 ♔f8 38.♖f1+ ♔e8 39.♕g4 ♕a6 40.♕f3 ♕b6 41.♕f8+ ♔d7 42.♖d1

Of course, 42...♕f6 would have held out longer. But we already know that the exchange of queens would have been fatal to Black's tournament hopes.

42...a4 43.♗c4 ♖xe4 44.♕a8 ♕c6?

The final mistake: 44...♖e5 45.♕xa4+ ♔c7 is necessary, with some small chances to draw.



45.♗b5!

An attractive tactical shot to finish, after which Black resigned immediately. Having won the tiebreaker by a 2-0 score, I became, at 17 years of age, a World Championship finalist.

And so I was in my first World Championship final. Unlike my previous matches, the final would consist of four games. In case of a tie score, a tiebreaker would be played, also consisting of four games. The first game went well: I managed to win and take the lead.

No. 16 Petroff's Defense C42

A.Kosteniuk – Zhu Chen

Moscow 2001 (m/1)

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘f6

Like Xu Yuhua, Zhu Chen decided to play the Petroff. But for this game, her choice was no longer a complete surprise, since the time we had for

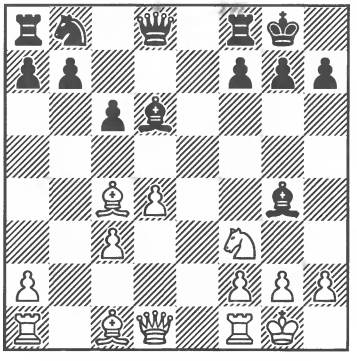
All is ready for the first game

preparation had allowed us to foresee such a development.

3.♘xe5 d6 4.♘f3 ♘xe4 5.d4 d5 6.♗d3 ♗d6 7.0-0 0-0 8.c4 c6 9.♘c3 ♘xc3 10.bxc3 dxc4

The main continuation in this position is 10...♗g4 11.cxd5 cxd5, or 11.♖e1 dxc4 12.♗xc4 ♕a5.

11.♗xc4 ♗g4



12.h3

Major theoretical battles have been fought around 12.♕d3!? ♘d7 (12...♗h5 13.♘g5 ♗g6 14.♕h3 ♕d7 15.♖e1 ♕xh3 16.♘xh3 ♘d7 17.♘f4, with some initiative for White, Deshmukh-Barua, India 1999) 13.♘g5 ♘f6 14.h3 ♗h5 15.f4 h6 16.♘f3. It has long been known that the aggressive 16.g4?! gives White no advantage, in view of 16...hxg5 17.fxg5 b5 18.♗b3 ♘xg4 19.hxg4 ♕d7 20.gxh5 ♕g4+ 21.♔f2 ♖ae8 22.♖g1 ♕h4+ 23.♔g2 ♕h2+ 24.♔f1 ♗f4! 25.♕f3 (25.♕d1 ♗xc1 26.♖xc1 ♕f4+ 27.♔g2 ♖e3, and Black wins) 25...♖e1+ 26.♔xe1 ♕xg1+ 27.♔e2 ♗xc1 28.♖xc1 ♕xc1 29.g6 ♖e8+ 30.♔d3 ♕b1+ 31.♔d2 ♕e1+ 32.♔d3 ♕b1+ 33.♔d2 with equality, A. Sokolov-Oll, Odessa 1989.

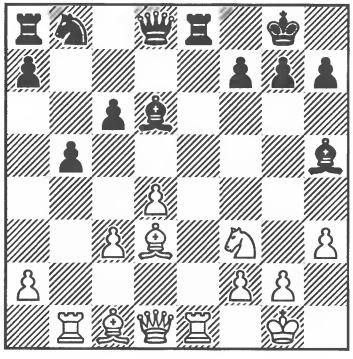
16...♗xf3 (16...b5!? 17.♗b3 a5 18.a4 ♗xf3 19.♕xf3 b4 20.c4, with unclear play) 17.♕xf3 (17.♖xf3?! ♖e8 gives Black counterplay, Kamsky-Bareev, Linares 1993) 17...♕e7 (17...♖e8!?) 18.♗d3 ♖fe8 19.♖b1 ♘d5 (19...♖ab8) 20.♗d2 a5 (20...b5 gives White a little the better of it) 21.a4! (21.f5?! ♘f6 gives Black counterplay, Plaskett-Finegold, Hastings 1988) 21...b6 22.♖be1 ♕c7 23.♗e4, with a small advantage for White.

12...♗h5 13.♖b1 b5 14.♗d3 ♖e8

Black has resolved all of her opening problems; after 14...♘d7 15.♗e4 ♖c8 16.a4 a6 17.♕d3 ♗g6 18.♗xg6 hxg6, the game would be about equal.

15.♖e1!?

I thought of an interesting plan: to offer an exchange of rooks on the e-file and let Black capture on f3, so that I could control the open file, and to use the doubled pawns to create a kingside attack.



15...♖xe1+?!

Here perhaps Black should not cede the open file, but instead play 15...♘d7!? with a complex, roughly equal game.

16.♕xe1 ♗xf3?!

Falling into White's strategic trap. It would have been better for Black to complete her development by 16...♘d7.

17.gxf3 a6 18.♕e4 g6 19.♗h6

By now it is obvious that White's pair of bishops and lead in development are sufficient compensation for the slight weakening of her pawn structure – especially with the f-pawn due to take on the role of battering ram.

19...♖a7 20.♕g4 ♕e8

Black should have been thinking about trading off the dark-squared bishops by 20...♗f8 21.♗xf8 ♕xf8 22.♖e1 c5!, with chances for both sides.

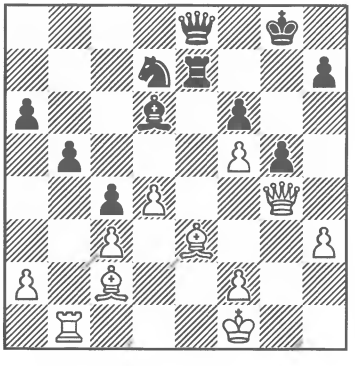
21.♔f1 ♖e7 22.f4 ♘d7 23.f5 c5?!

After this move, Black's knight loses its strong support point on d5. 23...♘f6 24.♕f3 ♘d5 is better, with an unclear game.

24.♗g5 f6 25.♗e3 c4

25...♖xe3?! 26.fxe3 ♕xe3 27.♗e4 g5 28.♕f3 cxd4 29.♖d1 doesn't work: White's chances are distinctly better here.

26.♗c2 g5



27.a4?!

27.♕f3 is more accurate, immediately removing the threat of a possible sacrifice on e3. For example, 27...♘b6 28.a4, and White develops an attack over the entire board.

27...♘b6

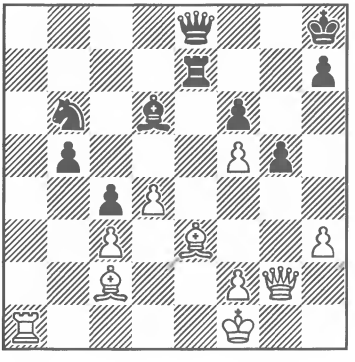
Here Black might have tried to complicate matters by means of an exchange sacrifice: 27...♖xe3 28.fxe3 ♕xe3 29.axb5 axb5 30.♖xb5 ♕xc3.

28.♕g2?!

With 28.♕f3!, White would have deprived her opponent of the dangerous exchange sacrifice at e3, retaining a small advantage.

28...♔h8 29.axb5 axb5 30.♖a1

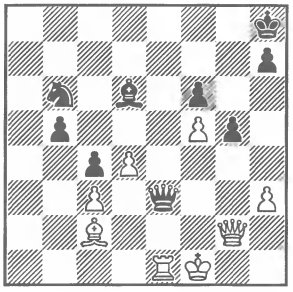
On 30.♕f3 b4!? 31.cxb4 ♕b5, Black has decent compensation for the sacrificed pawn.



30...♕c8?!

Black passes up her chance to seize the initiative. She had two interesting tries at her disposal: an exchange sacrifice, or the pawn break with ...b5-b4.

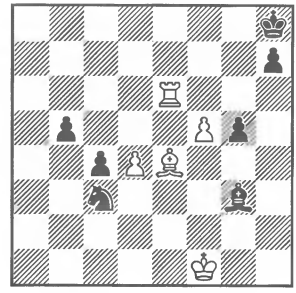
1) 30...♖xe3!? 31.fxe3 ♕xe3. Black obtains two pawns for the exchange, but more importantly leaves the white king less well defended than Black's king at h8. The bishop is passive on c2, the queen must defend as well as attack – in a word, this would not have been a simple position to play. But of course, one should not overdo it, either: Black would still have been the one fighting for the draw. For example, 32.♖e1:



1a) Black cannot get to the enemy king – it's too difficult to get her stranded knight at b6 back into the attack: 32... ♕f4+ 33.♔g1 ♘a4 34.♗xa4 bxa4 35.♕f2! (forcing Black into an ending where the rook's power far exceeds the bishop's) 35...a3 36.♕xf4 ♗xf4 37.♖e8+ (bringing the rook to a more active position: we know that the rook does a better job against passed pawns attacking them from the rear) 37...♔g7 38.♖a8 ♗d6 (nor will 38...♗c1 39.d5 ♗e3+ 40.♔g2 ♗c5 41.♖c8 save her) 39.♖a7+ ♔g8 40.♖a4, and White wins.

1b) 32...♕xc3 33.h4!?. The black king's fortifications must be broken down somehow, or the b-and c-pawns will start moving, and then it will be White's turn to think about drawing.

1b1) 33...♕g3?!. Despite the fact that in this variation, Black succeeds in creating connected passed pawns, the endgame is still very bad for her: 34.♕xg3 (34.hxg5 ♕f4+ 35.♕f2 ♕xg5, with counterplay) 34...♗xg3 35.♖e6 (White exploits the knight's lack of support to drive it into the far pasture, and sets her own kingside passed pawn in motion, which becomes quite dangerous with the support of the rook and bishop. On the other hand, she could also count on a small edge after 35.♖e8+ ♔g7 36.hxg5 fxg5 37.♖e7+ ♔f8.) 35...♘d5 36.hxg5 fxg5 37.♗e4 ♘c3:



38.f6 (threatening nothing more than mate on the move!) 38...♔g8 39.♗f3! (threatening ♗h5, weaving a mating net around the enemy king; Black's position is now untenable) 39...♔f7 40.♖a6 ♔g6 41.♗h5+, and the f-pawn will queen.

1b2) 33...♘d7! 34.hxg5 fxg5 35.♖e8+ ♘f8! (as the following variation shows, the knight cannot defend the bishop very securely: 35...♗f8 36.f6 h6 37.♕e4 ♕h3+ 38.♔e2 ♕h2+ 39.♔d1 ♕g1+ 40.♔d2 ♕f2+ 41.♔c1 ♕f4+ 42.♕xf4 gxf4 43.♖d8, and wins) 36.f6 h6! (36... ♕a1+ loses: 37.♖e1 ♕c3 38.♕xg5 ♕h3+ 39.♕g2 ♕xg2+ 40.♔xg2 ♔g8 41.♖e7) 37.♕e4 ♕h3+ 38.♔e1 ♕g3+ 39.♔d2 ♗f4+ 40.♔d1, and White cannot avoid the perpetual without suffering serious material losses.

2b) 30...b4!? 31.cxb4 ♕b5 is much safer – in this variation, Black obtains full play without any material sacrifices or increased responsibilities.

31.♖a5?!

Going over this game gives one the recurring feeling that both sides were taking turns ignoring interesting possibilities. Perhaps it was a consequence of the fact that behind us lay nearly two weeks of heavy, nerve-wracking

tournament play. Our strength was on the wane, but ahead lay the most important part: the battle for the chess crown.

31.h4!? gxh4 32.♕h3 ♘d5 33.♕xh4 ♕c6 34.♗h6 ♗f4 was worth considering, with chances for both sides.

31...♕e8

Once again, Black had an interesting pawn break: 31...b4! 32.cxb4 c3, with sharp play.

32.♖a6 ♗c7?

And again, Black could have sacrificed the exchange at e3: 32...♖xe3!? 33.fxe3 ♕xe3 34.♕e4 (34.♖xb6 ♕c1+ 35.♔e2 ♕xc2+ 36.♔f1 ♕b1+ is equal) 34... ♕xh3+ 35.♕g2 ♕e3, with equality.

32.♕f3!

Finally, White protects herself against the possible sacrifice at e3.

33...♕c8

33...b4!? still wasn't a bad way to obtain good counterplay.

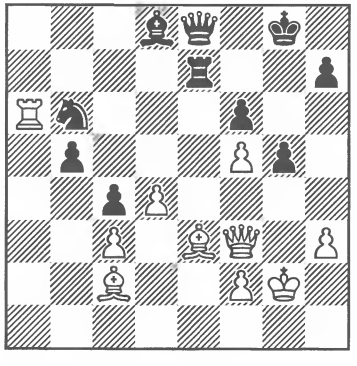
34.♖a1

White could also have tried the more active 34.♖a7!?.

34...♕e8 35.♔g2 ♔g8

35...♕d8 was better here, with an unclear position.

36.♖a7 ♗d8 37.♖a6



37...b4

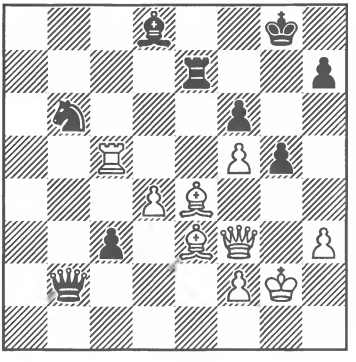
Black had to choose this break anyway, but by now, White's pieces have taken up much better positions than they had a few moves ago.

38.cxb4 ♕b5 39.♖a5

39.♖a2!? was worth considering, the idea being 39...♕xb4 40.♕c6.

39...♕xb4 40.♖c5 ♕b2 41.♗e4 c3?

After this move, the white pieces can no longer be prevented from claiming victory. Black had to play 41...♔g7 42.♖c6, although here too White has the better prospects.



42.♗d5+ ♔h8

After 42...♔f8, 43.♗e6 is still very unpleasant.

43.♗e6 ♕b4 44.♕c6! ♔g7 45.♕d6 ♘d7 46.♗xd7 ♖xe3 47.♗e6 ♖xe6

On 47...♕b7+, 48.d5 ends matters.

48.fxe6 ♗a5 49.♕d7+ ♔h6 50.e7

Black resigned.

So here I was, in the final match for the title of World Champion, ahead 1-0. After the first match game, we had a free day. As strange as it may sound, I spent my free day traveling – to the Institute, to take an exam. Generally, my schedule during this World Championship differed little from

the usual: I lived at home, returning after each game by subway, and still managed to attend the Institute on my free days. Of course, such an approach lacks any hint of professionalism; but on the other hand, it also enabled me not to get totally wrapped up in the chess battle, and consequently gave me a chance to get away from the tournament, even in the very middle of the struggle. Nowadays, of course, I would not attempt such experiments; but at that time, I was just 17, and saw life in much simpler terms. Even today, I wish I knew how to live so completely without care.

After winning the first game, I suffered terrible losses in the second and third games. In order to keep playing for the title, I had to win the fourth and last game, where I had Black. The day before this game was a free day. That day, Emil Sutovsky called me and gave me a few valuable tips on how to arrange the battle and what openings to choose. That call was a very important one for me. Before Game Four, he helped me regain confidence in myself and in my chances of winning. For the last game, I now had a plan of action, which can sometimes be even more important than concrete opening variations.

No. 17 Dutch Defense A90

Zhu Chen – A. Kosteniuk

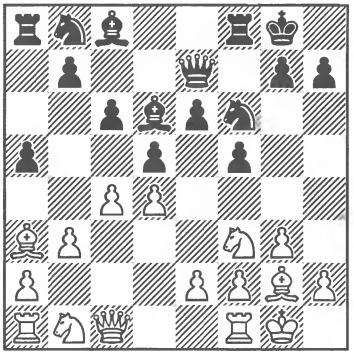
Moscow 2001 (m/4)

1.d4 f5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.g3 e6

The aforementioned plan consisted of the following: set up a Stonewall formation, and then wait...and wait...and then – wait some more. Maneuver, slowly and patiently; and when you get closer to time pressure, then try to complicate the game.

4.♗g2 d5 5.0-0 ♗d6 6.b3 ♕e7 7.c4 c6 8.♗b2 0-0 9.♕c1 a5 10.♗a3

Black's position has one obvious weakness, the e5 square; so it would be advantageous for White to trade off the dark-squared bishops. Meanwhile, Black hopes to create an attack on the kingside, eventually; but it will be a long time before this can happen. White's fianchettoed bishop and knight on f3 are securely guarding the approaches to the king's fortress. On the whole, White's position is slightly preferable, but Black's is quite solid.



10...♘a6

Of course, I could not take in all the nuances of the Stonewall in just one day. I can't say that I know any more about it even now. This game is the only one I have ever played in my entire life with this system.

Besides the text, Black has other alternatives: 10...b5 11.♗xd6 ♕xd6 12.♘bd2 ♘bd7 13.♕c2 ♗a6 14.♖fc1, or 10...♗b4!? 11.♗xb4 axb4 12.c5 ♘bd7, in either case with chances for both sides.

11.♗xd6 ♕xd6 12.c5 ♕e7

Game Four: Erecting the Stonewall. Zhu Chen leads, 2-1

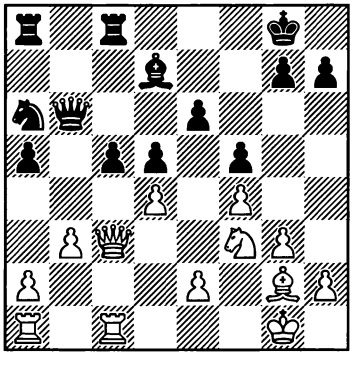
I had what I was after: a closed position, in which both White and Black must maneuver carefully and without rushing.

13.♘e5 ♘d7 14.♘xd7 ♗xd7 15.f4 b6

You can't play without any open lines! The pieces need space to move. After removing the pawn at c5, Black eventually hopes to play ...c6-c5.

16.cxb6 ♕b4 17.♕c3 ♕xb6 18.♘d2 ♖fc8 19.♖fc1 c5 20.♘f3

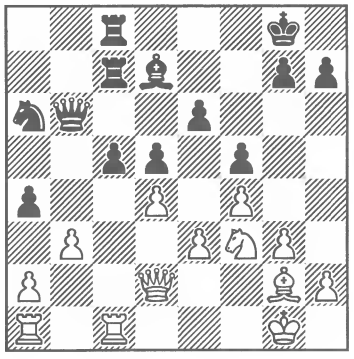
The knight aims for the hallowed ground at e5, while also defending the d4-pawn. The game's center of gravity has migrated to the queenside, where Black's "bad" bishop may turn out to be stronger than White's "good" bishop at g2, which faces Black's wall of pawns.



20...♖c7

Of course, engaging in a lot of exchanges was not part of my plan: 20...cxd4 21.♕xd4 ♕xd4+ 22.♘xd4 ♘b4 23.a3 ♘c6 24.♘xc6 ♗xc6 25.♖c5 ♔f7 26.♖ac1 ♗d7 27.♔f2, and in this endgame, only White can play for the win.

21.e3 ♖ac8 22.♕d2 a4!?



23.♘e5

Of course, I would have answered 23.bxa4?! with 23...c4.

23...♗e8 24.dxc5 ♘xc5 25.bxa4 ♗xa4

The position is even; but since a draw counted the same as a loss, I could only wait patiently and hope that at some point my opponent, only a half-step away from that precious crown, would lose her nerve.

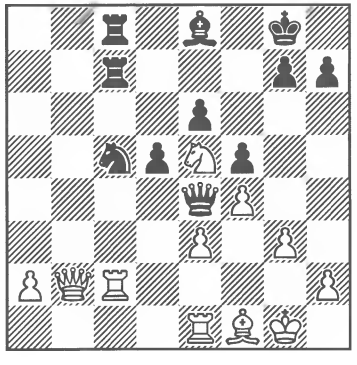
26.♖ab1 ♕a7 27.♕d4 ♗e8 28.♖c2 ♕a3 29.♕c3 ♕a4

This phase of the game doesn't require lengthy annotation.

30.♕b2 ♕a6 31.♗f1 ♕a7 32.♕d4

White also is not averse to standing in place, since it's Black who needs to win. Perhaps White should have played something active, such as 32.♕b6!?.

32...♕a3 33.♕c3 ♕a4 34.♕b2 ♕e4 35.♖e1



35...g5!?

Objectively speaking, this move should be condemned. But if you take my situation into account, then you might also give it the exclamation mark. With time pressure looming, I make a sharp change in the character of the struggle and set my opponent concrete problems.

35...♘d7 36.♖xc7 ♖xc7 37.♗d3 ♕a4 leads to abject equality.

36.♗g2 ♕a4 37.♖ec1

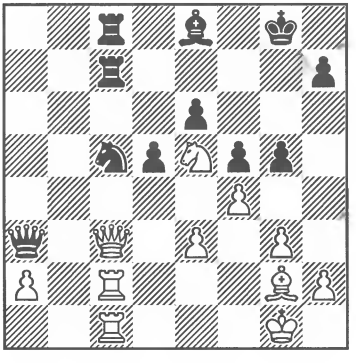
White should have accepted the challenge and played 37.fxg5!, when the advantage swings to White.

37...♕a5

37...♕a7, placing the queen on the same diagonal as the opposing king, would have been good too – perhaps it would have come in handy in time pressure?!

38.♕c3 ♕a7 39.♕d4 ♕a3 40.♕c3?

With the last move before the time control, my opponent makes a mistake. It was not too late to play 40.fxg5, when the combination 40...♘b3 fails due to 41.♕b6 ♕xc1+ (after 41...♖xc2 Black will be mated: 42.♕xe6+ ♔f8 43.♕f6+ ♔g8 44.♗xd5+ etc.) 42.♖xc1 ♖xc1+ 43.♗f1 ♘d2 44.♕xe6+ and wins.



40...♘b3! 41.♕xb3?

It was not too late to fight on with 41.♕d3 ♕xc1+ 42.♖xc1 ♖xc1+ 43.♗f1 ♘c5 44.♕a3 ♘e4!? (44...♖b1 gives Black a small edge) 45.♕a6 ♗f7 46.♕a7 ♖1c7, with somewhat better play for Black. But White is upset, and errs yet again.

41...♕xb3 42.axb3 ♖xc2

White could have resigned here, but she makes a few more moves out of inertia.

43.♖xc2 ♖xc2 44.fxg5

Finally White decides to capture this pawn – but it can no longer change anything.

44...♖e2 45.♘f3 ♖xe3 46.♘d4 ♔f7 47.♗f1 ♗d7 48.♔f2 ♖c3 49.b4 e5 50.♘f3 ♔e6 51.♘h4 e4 52.g6 hxg6 53.♘xg6 d4 54.h4 ♖c2+ 55.♔e1 ♖c1+ 56.♔f2 e3+ 57.♔g1 ♗b5

The great hall of the Kremlin's Hall of Congresses was filled with people at the start of the tournament, since the men's and the women's World Championships started together. But now, there were only myself and Zhu Chen on the stage (since the final of the men's World Championship between Ruslan Ponomariov and Vassily Ivanchuk would not take place for another month), and there were a lot of spectators in the hall. Here White resigned, and the hall exploded with joy... To tell the truth, no one ever rooted for me that way again. After the game ended, in order to get to the coatroom (players and spectators all used the same cloakroom), I had to make my way through a celebrating throng.

The human memory works in strange ways. I remember only bits of it – a few clear moments. Sometimes it seems that my body is defending itself this way against the overly powerful experiences and emotions I am subjected to. I can't

With Oxana: Victory is sweeter when you can share it

say I remember that day very well; but I do have one photograph in my album which is very dear to me: of me with my sister Oxana, taken right after the end of this game. This is exactly why I love photography – I could never find the words to describe that moment, but by lucky chance, the moment was captured by a camera shutter, and that picture can tell you a lot!

The match was now even up at 2-2; the following day would feature the four-game tiebreaker.

No. 18 Sicilian Defense B80
A.Kosteniuk – Zhu Chen
Moscow 2001 (m/6)

This was the second game of the Final tiebreaker – and the last game I managed to win. Emil Sutovsky, who had given me helpful advice for the fourth game, said that he would call during the breaks between games of the tiebreaker. But of course, what should happen, but that I forgot my cell phone at home, and unfortunately had to forget about getting his valuable advice.

I lost the first tiebreaker game and won the second – and by then, I felt physically exhausted. This could only mean one thing: my strength was gone. I tried to fight on, but the outcome only underscored the fact that I was not destined to become World Champion this time. Now that I understand what it means to be the champion, I don't regret it. I became Vice-Champion, which gave me another few years to quietly develop and play my game.

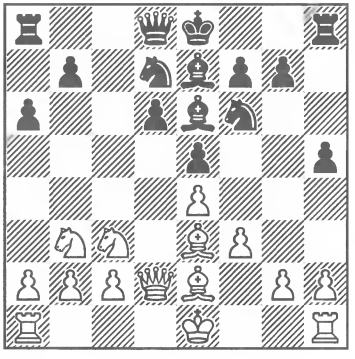
So here's my last little triumph of the 2001 World Championship.

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 a6 6.f3 e5 7.♘b3 ♗e6 8.♗e3 ♗e7 9.♕d2 h5

Tiebreaker: The decisive game

By now, the English Attack has been studied inside and out. But back then the theory was only starting to develop, and one might even risk playing this variation.

10.♗e2 ♘bd7

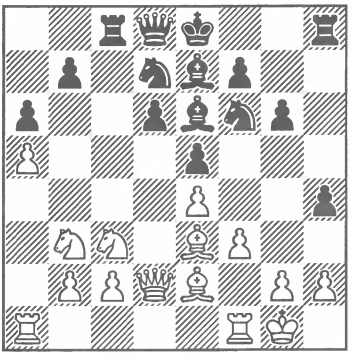


11.a4

A little earlier at this same World Championship in Moscow, Veselin Topalov had chosen a different continuation against Zhang Zhong: 11.♘d5!? ♘xd5 12.exd5 ♗f5 13.0-0 ♕c7 14.c4 b6 15.f4 g6 16.♖ad1! (16.fxe5 dxe5 leads to an unclear position) 16...a5 17.fxe5 ♘xe5 18.♖xf5!? gxf5 19.♘d4, with rich compensation for the sacrificed exchange.

And after she became World Champion, my opponent outplayed the men's Champion at the Rapid World Cup: 13...0-0 (rather than 13...♕c7) 14.♘a5 ♕c7 15.c4 ♗f6 16.♖ac1 b6 17.♘c6 a5 18.f4 exf4 19.♗xf4 ♗g6 20.♗d3 ♗xd3 21.♕xd3 ♖ae8 22.♖c2 ♘b8 23.♕g3, and although White's advantage is indisputable in this position, it is Black who eventually won (Ponomariov-Zhu Chen, Dubai 2002).

11...♖c8 12.a5 g6 13.0-0 h4



14.♘a4?!

In the last rapid game of our match, I improved on this line by continuing 14.♘d5, but played inaccurately in the middlegame and lost: 14...♗xd5 15.exd5 ♘h5 16.c4 f5 17.♖fd1 (17.♗d3!?) 17...f4 18.♗f2 h3 19.c5 dxc5 20.d6?! (after 20.♗d3 ♔f7 21.♕c2, White could expect a small advantage) 20...♗h4 21.♗c4 ♗xf2+ 22.♕xf2 ♕g5 23.♖d2 ♘hf6 24.♕e1 ♔f8 25.♖e2 e4 26.fxe4 ♘e5 27.♕c3 ♘xe4 28.♕c2 ♘f3+ 29.♔f1 ♘xh2+ 30.♔e1 ♘f3+ 31.♔d1 hxg2 32.♕xe4 g1♕+ 33.♔c2 ♘d4+ 34.♘xd4 ♕xd4 35.♖f1 ♕xe4+ 36.♖xe4 ♕g2+, and White resigned (Kosteniuk-Zhu Chen, Moscow 2001).

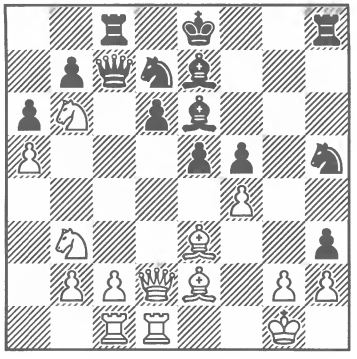
14...♘h5?!

Black should have immediately implemented the main strategic idea of the whole variation – the ...d6-d5 break: 14...d5!? 15.♗b6 ♘xb6 16.♘xb6 ♖c6, when the small advantage would have been hers instead.

15.♖fd1 f5 16.exf5 gxf5 17.f4 ♕c7 18.♖ac1 h3

18...♘hf6!? deserves a look, for example: 19.♗f3 ♘e4 20.♗xe4 fxe4 21.fxe5 ♘xe5 (21...dxe5 22.♘b6 ♘xb6 23.axb6 favors White) 22.♘b6 ♖g8 23.♔h1, with chances for both sides.

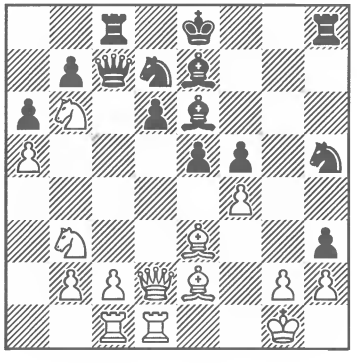
19.♘b6



19...♘df6?

The exchange sacrifice is incorrect in this case. Black should have preferred 19...♘xb6 20.♗xb6 ♕b8 21.g3, with a complex game. Now White obtains an indisputable advantage.

20.♘xc8 ♕xc8 21.♗f3 hxg2



22.c4!

I finished this game in one breath – my last one, as it turned out. 22.fxe5?! dxe5 23.♗g5 ♖g8 24.♖e1 ♕c7, leaving the position unclear, would have been clearly weaker.

22...♔f7 23.c5! ♗xb3

23...♘xf4 24.♗xf4 dxc5 25.♗xe5 ♗xb3 26.♖e1 wouldn't have saved her, either.

24.cxd6 ♕e6 25.♖c7! ♗xd1 26.♕xd1 ♔g6 27.♖xe7

Black's king turns out to be much weaker than its counterpart – which is explained, above all, by the activity of White's pieces.

27...♕c4 28.fxe5 ♘g3 29.♔xg2 f4?

Losing without a struggle. 29...♘g4 was stronger, when White would still have definite problems to solve. Of course, after the coldly accurate 30.♗d4!, Black's attack would still have come too late.

30.exf6 ♘f5 31.♗f2

Whereas here White is up material – except that she has a won position, too!

31...♔xf6 32.♖e4

White could also have played 32.♗d5, in order to chase Black's king right into the middle of the board after 32...♕c8 33.♖f7+!.

32...♕g8+ 33.♗g4 ♕h7 34.♕f3 ♕xh2+ ("Check" is a long way from "mate"!) **35.♔f1 ♖c8 36.♖xf4 ♖c1+ 37.♔e2 ♖c2+ 38.♔d3**

White's king also decides to take a stroll – mustn't lag behind Black's, after all.

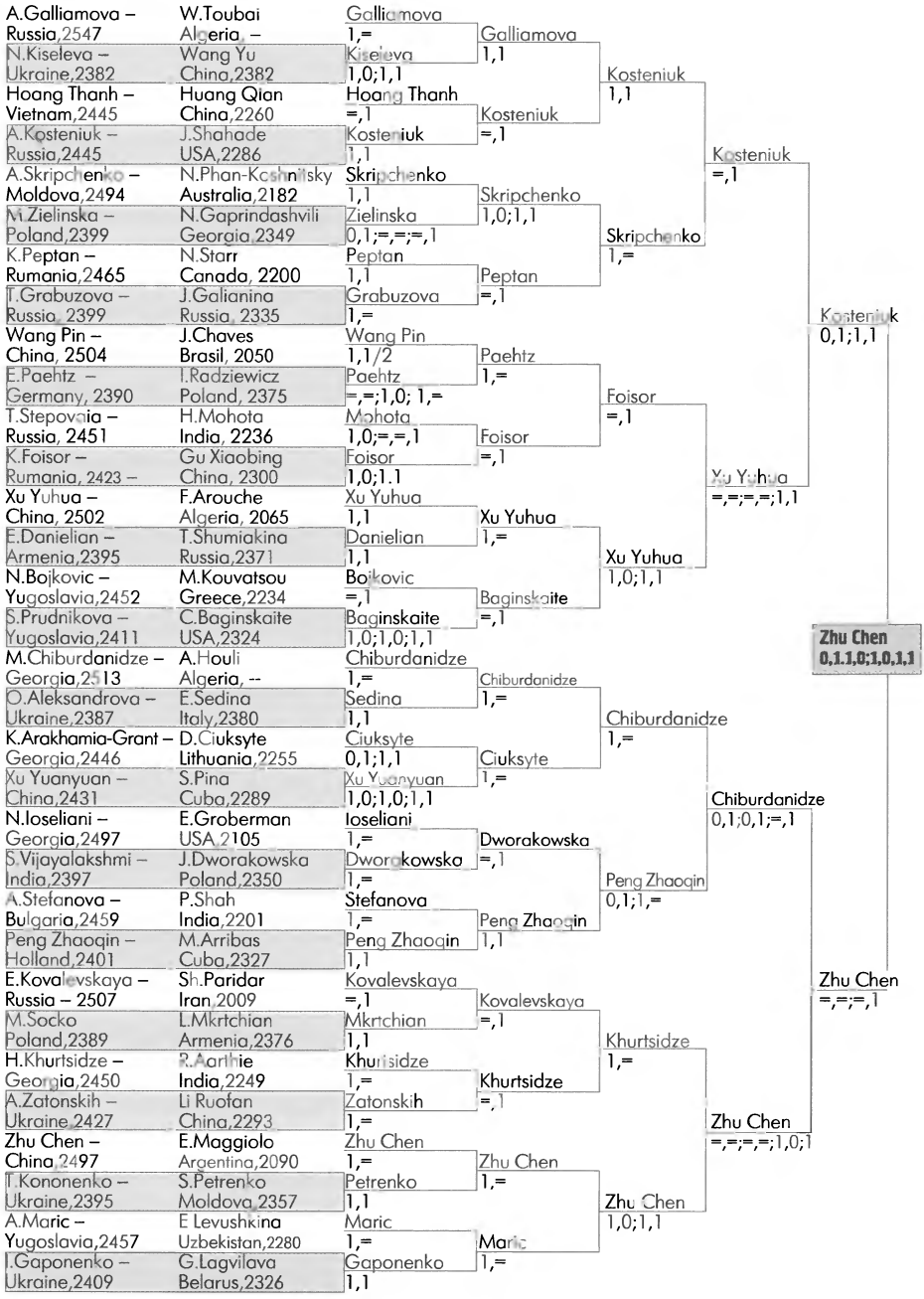
Black resigned.

At age 17 I was Vice-Champion of the World. Certainly, before the tournament began, no one had expected this turn of events. During the World Championship, my website www.kosteniuk.com was launched, offering daily onsite reports. During the Final, my website logged over 10,000 visitors a day! Since then, I have devoted considerable attention to the development of my websites. Because chess has one tremendous advantage over other types of sport: we can play and work on chess online, and also follow the moves of a tournament in real time!

According to a poll conducted at the www.chessbase.com website in January 2002, I was named the best chessplayer of 2001, outvoting even Garry Kasparov!

After the World Championship in Moscow, everyone started expecting top results and victories from me. From being one of a number of hopeful young women chessplayers, I had stepped into the elite of international women's chess.

Draw of the Women's World Championship 2001



Chapter 5
After the Applause Died Down

Success at the World Championships in Moscow somehow eclipsed the events in which I played in 2002 and 2003: I had no equally impressive sporting achievements in those years. But life went on, as it always does; and in my life, there were many very important and interesting events outside chess.

After my "Kremlin breakthrough," everyone suddenly remembered my modeling photographs from early 2001. The Western press crowned me the "Kournikova of Chess." At first, the label made me smile; but people continued to call me that. Now, when Anna Kournikova's tennis career is long over, I find it puzzling. It was the 2001 World Championship that made me understand how important it was to work constantly with the press; and since that time I have given a lot of attention to photoshoots and my off-the-board activities. The popularity of chess during the Fischer, Karpov, and Kasparov eras can be explained by the outsized personalities of those grandmasters. People who do not play chess aren't very interested in what novelty Grandmaster N employed on move 40 in Petroff's Defense; what interests them are the grandmasters themselves – their life, their work, and everything even remotely connected with chess. Of course, once you set out on this path, you make yourself a public figure whose every step is subject to the scrutiny of people who know very little about you or your life. Often enough, I have found myself the target of sharp attacks and insults from those who think they have a right to judge others.

In February 2002, not yet fully recovered from the three-week marathon of the World Championship, I competed in the very strong Aeroflot Open. My 2/9 result brought me back down to earth from the clouds. I saw that success at the World Championship was just an isolated achievement, and that I still had a lot of work to do.

In March 2002, I took a long trip to Singapore and Indonesia. In Indonesia, I took on a "Dream Team" composed of the country's three best junior players, playing two games against each of them. As often happens with similarly-named teams, the Indonesian juniors' result was far from stellar: I won by a score of 6-0.

After my success at the 2001 World Championship, I thought that finally I would gain support and the opportunity to work with strong chess specialists; but nothing changed. In addition to purely financial support, in order to set up a proper training plan and to find exactly the right specialists with whom it would be useful to work, one also needs a lot of experience – which of course, at 17, I did not have. I can't say I was at all surprised by any of this – I didn't even

think it could be otherwise. At the beginning of my career in the sport, it was my father who helped me; and were it not for his enthusiasm, energy, and belief in me, I would not be writing this book. For many, many years, "knowledgeable" people told Dad again and again that working with me was a pure waste of time; but he continued the work regardless. So my rise up the chess ladder "not because of, but in spite of" was just business as usual.

Of course, now I can't complain about how it all turned out. History does not allow for hypotheticals: it is meaningless to think about what might have been if things had turned out otherwise. Life goes on. Even in Russia – a country famous for its chess traditions – talented players have often had to overcome a high wall of obstacles. So it's no surprise that out of all the talented youngsters in chess, there should be a few who lack a certain something in order to achieve really great results. The strength of the Soviet school of chess rested largely on its pillars – good trainers and teachers who nurtured grandmasters. In the complex period of the early '90s, many of those specialists left Russia, which had its effect. It's no accident that today we see that India, China, Vietnam, and other countries, one after another, are producing talented junior chessplayers. There's some serious work behind them, accomplished in the past decade; and a lot of that work was done by our (former) specialists, who left Russia to make their living. It might seem as though anybody who knows the rules could teach a youngster how to play chess, but it's not that simple. It seems obvious to me now: whatever founda-

Turning 18 with my family

tion is laid when you first start teaching presages the kind of chessplayer you will produce. The main thing an experienced teacher must avoid is stunting the student; he must teach him not only how to play chess, but also how to do his own work on it.

On April 23, 2002, I turned 18; Diego proposed, and I accepted. We were married in August of that same year. I am lucky to have met a man, so early in my life, who understands me so well and is ready to do everything he can to make me happy.

Here are a few words from my diary of September 18, 2002:

There are people who are so much like each other that sometimes you wonder how it is possible. How, on this great planet Earth, in completely different cities, at absolutely different times, could there be two people who meet and find that they are so much alike? The world is a fragile place, and sometimes love is just a fairy tale we tell ourselves. But if we can make anything in this life, if we have it in our power to influence this ever-changing, fast-moving world, then we can only do it in the name of love, and with love.

Of course, marriage completely changed my life. I left my parents' home, and my life and training regimen changed. At the age of 18, I began to learn how to work on chess independently. This was not at all easy, since over many years I had become accustomed to working either with my father or with a trainer. Nowadays, of course, I would be fully able to set up my work and training exactly the way I

August 2002: Wedding day in St. Petersburg

"Match of the Graces": Alexandra Kosteniuk faces off with Elisabeth Pähtz, Mainz, August 2002

did it at the beginning of 2008. But this is exactly what they call experience: it's not just the willingness to work, but the ability to set up a training process. In 2002, I still had no idea how or with whom I should be working.

I spent the entire summer of 2002 ranging through Europe, playing in various open tournaments. I also played a few matches: against Anatoly Karpov in the final of a rapid tournament in Spain (I lost 1-3, but I did manage to win one game); with the English hope David Howell in London (I won that one by a score of 3½:½); and the "Match of the Graces" against Elizabeth Pähtz in Mainz, which I only managed to eke out in the tiebreaker.

In August 2002, I made my debut – in film! At the invitation of director Stanislav Govorukhin, I appeared in his film, "Bless the Woman." The film shoot took place in Odessa, Ukraine. I had no idea what to expect of the film world; all I knew of the filming process was what various movie stars said in their interviews. Playing a game of chess, I was accustomed to working from start to finish, not waiting around for hours at a time – which is probably why I imagined that working on a film would be just the same. But the actual duration of shooting is pretty short – a few minutes at most. The whole rest of the time that you spend on the set is all setting up the lighting, repetition, and waiting, for which I was totally unprepared.

Generally speaking, at age 18 I had no idea how to sit and relax. I did not understand how it was possible to do nothing. I absolutely had to put every minute of free time to some use. After

At the film premiere with Mom, Moscow, 2003

the birth of my daughter, I've become more accepting of those free moments. But during filming, I suffered a lot because, instead of preparing for the World Cup that coming fall, I had to wait and do nothing while they set up the lights. But all this suffering was forgotten when I was invited to the premiere a year later and saw my name in the credits. While filming, I had the chance to work with such famous Russian actors as Inna Churikova, Alexander Mikhailov, Alexander Baluyev, and Irina Kupchenko. I was pleasantly surprised by the openness and simplicity of these famous people. Even though I had absolutely no filming experience, they all treated me very warmly. There was also an amazing film crew working on the film. The chestnuts were in bloom in Odessa while we were filming. The

A shot from the movie

crew trimmed the chestnut trees into amusing chess pieces, just for me. Even today, if I visit the Mosfilm studios and meet any of the people who worked on "Bless the Woman," they always greet me with genuine joy.

In October 2002, I competed without any great success in the World Cup in Hyderabad, India; I was unable to qualify out of my preliminary group to the final of the competition.

At the end of November came my long-awaited debut as a member of the Russian national team at the World Chess Olympiad in Bled. Even though I already had one Olympiad in 1998 on my résumé – where I played most successfully for the Kalmyk team (known as Russia-3) – I had not yet played under the flag of my country as part of its top team.

The World Chess Olympiad is a unique event, requiring a separate, detailed discussion. It's a big chess vacation, where the main idea for most teams is the participation, not the result. But for the teams fighting for victory, an Olympiad is a most difficult, tense tournament. And this strange combination of a feast for some participants and a complex, uncompromising struggle for others has its own peculiar charm. At this point, I have played in five Olympiads. Of these, the best-organized was the Bled Olympiad. This pretty, quiet little town, located next to a mountain lake, as though specially made for evening strolls after a tense round, created a wonderful atmosphere for chess battles.

Team play differs markedly from competition in individual events. What they call team spirit plays a not inconsiderable role, and often the team favorites (based on average team ratings) can find themselves ending up a long way from the medal list.

In Bled, the women's teams consisted of three players and one reserve. On first board we had Ekaterina Kovalevskaya; second board was Svetlana Matveeva; I played third board; and on reserve was Tatiana Kosintseva, who was also making her team debut.

I have loved team events since I was a child; to this day, I have warm memories of the Moscow tournaments for the children's clubs, which took place on Saturdays. I played for the Pervomaisky Hall of Pioneers, and always did well.

The Olympiad started very well for me.

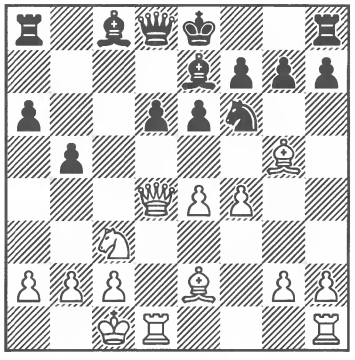
No. 19 Sicilian Defense B66
A.Kosteniuk – N. Khurtsidze
Bled 2002

This game, from the match against Georgia, was practically won at home. I guessed the variation correctly, after which – with the help of a strong novelty on move 17, found prior to the game by Peter Svidler, and the purely computer move 22.b4 – I succeeded in obtaining an absolutely winning position. However, a later inaccuracy gave me additional difficulties to overcome.

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 ♘c6 6.♗g5

The Rauzer system once again, this time with White. The very best way to study an opening variation or system is to start playing it for both sides.

6...e6 7.♕d2 a6 8.0-0-0 ♘xd4 9.♕xd4 ♗e7 10.f4 b5 11.♗e2

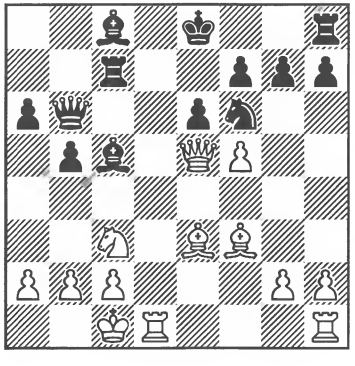


11...♖b8?!

This is a somewhat dubious line (as I managed to demonstrate in this game), but it was in common use by Georgian players in those days. Now Black more often plays 11...♗b7, the idea being to put the rook on the half-open file in one move – ...♖c8 – rather than employing the rather strange roundabout route ...♖a8-b8-b7-c7.

12.e5 dxe5 13.♕xe5 ♕b6 14.f5 ♖b7 15.♗f3 ♖c7 16.♗e3 ♗c5

16...♕a5 loses to the far-from-obvious 17.♘a4!.



17.♗h6! 0-0 18.♘e4 ♘e8

18...♗e3+ 19.♗xe3 ♕xe3+ 20.♔b1 is a bad idea.

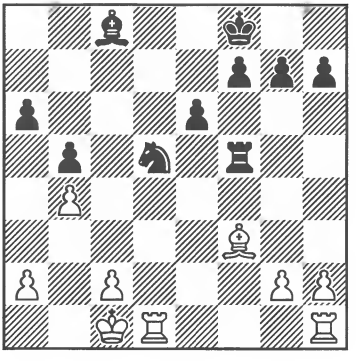
19.♘xc5 ♖xc5 20.♗e3 ♖xe5 21.♗xb6 ♖xf5 22.b4!

After this move, it becomes clear that the rook on f8 is trapped. Black's own pieces have walled in the rook.

22...♘f6

Nor does 22...f6 help Black, since then the bishop is the one that's trapped: 23.♖d8.

23.♗c5 ♘d5 24.♗xf8 ♔xf8



25.♖d4?

In this position, the simple 25.♖xd5! would have been decisive: if 25... exd5, then 26.♗g4. When you are converting an extra exchange, trading the remaining pair of rooks leads to an absolutely hopeless ending for the defending side.

25...♔e7 26.♖e1 ♗b7 27.♗e4 ♖e5 28.♔d2 ♔d6

But now Black has managed to fortify her position, and breaking down her defense is no longer so easy. I have to start winning the game all over again.

29.a4!?

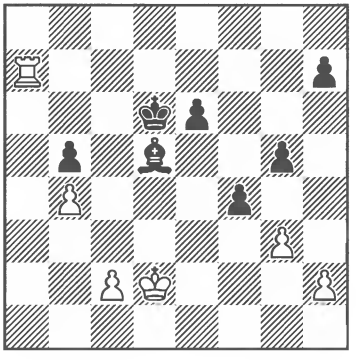
Trying to open lines for the rooks.

29...f5 30.♗xd5 ♖xd5 31.♖xd5+ ♗xd5 32.axb5 axb5

Although White has managed to trade off nearly all the pieces, Black's connected center pawns, supported by her bishop, will not be easily stopped. At the same time, White finds it very difficult to create a passed pawn of her own on the queenside.

33.g3 g5 34.♖a1 f4 35.♖a7

Piece activity is of great importance in the endgame.



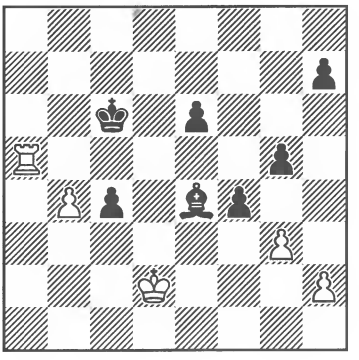
35...♗e4

Giving up control of c4, but otherwise it will be hard to defend her kingside pawns. During the game, it appeared to me that 35...e5 would set White greater problems, for example: 36.♖xh7?! e4, and the connected passed pawns are very dangerous. But then I found 36.♖g7! h6 (36...e4 37.♖xg5 e3+ 38.♔e2 ♗c4+ 39.♔f3 e2 40.♔f2, and the pawns are stopped) 37.♖g6+ ♗e6 38.c4 bxc4 39.b5 ♔d5 40.b6 ♗c8 41.♖g7 e4 42.b7 e3+ 43.♔e2 (but not 43.♔e1 ♗xb7 44.♖xb7 f3, when the position has become unclear) 43...♗g4+ 44.♔e1 f3 45.♖f7 and wins.

36.♖a6+ ♔d7 37.♖a5 ♔c6 38.c4!

Finally creating a passed pawn.

38...bxc4



39.♖c5+?!

Having reached a winning position, White once again commits an error. White wins easily after 39.♖xg5 f3 40.♖c5+ ♔d6 41.♖xc4 f2 42.♖c1 (just not 42.♔e2?? ♗d3+!) 42...♗g2 43.♔e2, when the extra pawn – and an outside passed pawn, at that! – secures the victory.

39...♔d6 40.♖xc4 ♗d5 41.♖c8 e5 42.b5

The race begins.

42...e4 43.b6 e3+ 44.♔d3 ♗b7

On 44...♗c6, 45.gxf4 gxf4 46.♖f8 ♗b5+ 47.♔c3 would decide.

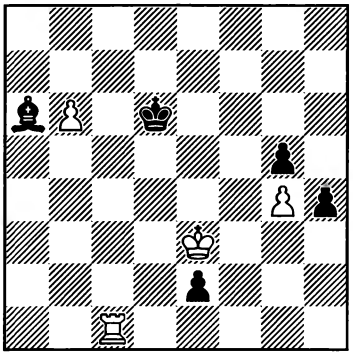
45.♖c7 ♗a6+ 46.♔d4 e2 47.♖c1 fxg3

After 47...♗b7 48.gxf4 gxf4 49.♔d3 f3 50.♔d2 ♗c6 51.♔e1, White establishes a blockade on the dark squares, after which her rook will get through to the h7-pawn.

48.hxg3 h5 49.♔e3 h4 50.g4 *(D)*

50...e1♕+?

Now the win is simple. 50...h3 was stronger – but even then, White has a study-like win: 51.♔f2 ♗b7 52.♔g3 ♗g2 53.♖b1!. Black is in *zugzwang*: 53...♔c5 (53...♔e5 54.♖e1) 54.♖e1 ♔xb6 55.♖xe2 ♔c6 56.♖e5 ♔d6 57.♖xg5 ♔e6 58.♖f5, and White wins.



51.♖xe1 ♔c6 52.♔f2 ♗c8 53.♖c1+ ♔b7 54.♔f3 h3 55.♖c7+ ♔b8 56.♔g3 h2 57.♖h7

Black resigned.

After this game, I had scored 5/6. The concluding part of this Olympiad was not so successful – my final result at this Olympiad was 7 out of 11. Our women's team finished second to the Chinese team, who took the gold medals. We were also happy to see our men's team, led by Garry Kasparov, who was in fine form, take the gold medals. Those were still the days when gold was considered by everyone as something normal for our men's team. However, our team has thus far been unable to repeat its first-place performance at the Olympiad in Bled: in the next three Tournaments of Nations, they've made the top three just once.

From 2002 through 2005, I played fairly frequently in men's open tournaments, making up for the lack of steady work with a trainer by practical play. Of course, the best course is to find some golden mean – say, playing in tournaments no more than once a month, while spending the remaining time in serious work, doing

Joyous arrival. The winners of the silver medal at the Bled Olympiad: Tatiana Kosintseva, Alexandra Kosteniuk, Svetlana Matveeva, Ekaterina Kovalevskaya, and coach Yuri Yakovich

exercises and preparing for the following tournaments.

I celebrated the New Year 2003 by playing in the Hastings Chess Congress. This famous tournament has been held in England since 1895. Every world champion except Fischer and Kasparov has competed in this famous tournament at least once. But my memories of Hastings are of the cold and windy weather and of the enormous sports hall where we played. This was a Category XII tournament, a level of play at which I had had no experience as yet. The competitors in the 2002/03 Congress included the Indian grandmasters Krishnan Sasikiran and Pentala Harikrishna, the 12-year-old wunderkind Sergey Karjakin, the Dane Peter-Heine Nielsen, and other strong grandmasters. After a hard struggle, first place went to Nielsen, who later became Viswanathan Anand's second.

No. 20 Sicilian Defense B33
A.Kosteniuk – L. McShane
Hastings 2003

This game was from the last round. I began the tournament quite well, with 1.5/2, but completely blew the "middlegame" phase, scoring zero in rounds 5 through 8. This explains my desire to improve my tournament standing, if only a little – especially since, right after Hastings, I was due to play in yet another strong round-robin in Wijk aan Zee.

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 e5

In contemporary opening theory, there are certain opening setups which always frighten anyone who plays 1.e4 and hopes to gain an opening advantage. One of these, of course, is the Sveshnikov Variation.

6.♘db5 d6 7.♗g5 a6 8.♘a3 b5 9.♗xf6 gxf6 10.♘d5 f5 11.♗d3 ♗e6 12.0-0 ♗xd5 13.exd5 ♘e7

One of the basic theoretical positions. These days, independent play in the Sveshnikov doesn't start until move 30, or in some cases, even move 40. White attempts to exploit the weaknesses in his opponent's pawn structure, while Black, in turn, bets on dynamic piece play.

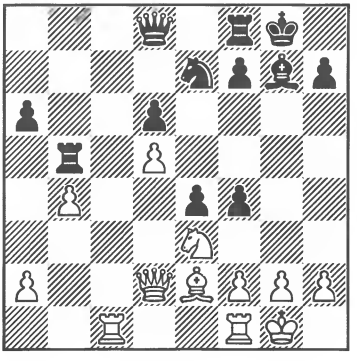
14.c4!?

An immediate attempt to attack Black's weaknesses. I played this variation

Kosteniuk battles McShane in the last round at Hastings 2002/03

for a short while as White. The basic idea is simple: either to win a pawn on the queenside, or to exchange my d-pawn for Black's a-pawn, and then try to deal with Black's strong pawn center and promote my extra queenside pawns before my opponent can do likewise. But the simplicity is only in the words. Of course, Black obtains sufficient counterplay in the center and on the kingside. So now I hesitate to employ this variation, as it gives Black too many dangerous possibilities.

14...e4 15.♗e2 ♗g7 16.♕d2 bxc4 17.♘xc4 0-0 18.♖ac1 ♖b8 19.b4 ♖b5 20.♘e3 f4

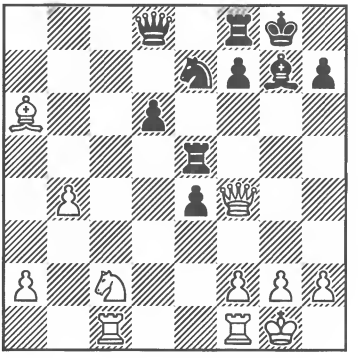


21.♘c2

A novelty. In the stem game of this line, White unsuccessfully tried to demonstrate that a rook and two pawns here would be stronger than two pieces: 21.♗xb5 fxe3 22.♕xe3 axb5 23.♕xe4 ♘g6, and after a complex struggle, the game ended in a draw (Hübner-Sax, Tilburg 1979). My idea, as I already mentioned, was to bet on my queenside pawns.

21...♖xd5 22.♕xf4 ♖e5 23.♗xa6

Even before the game, I had decided that this was the way I would play the variation. Black, of course, has compensation for the pawn; but the position is sharp enough that both White and Black must play very carefully.



23...d5

A little bit later, in another strong round-robin tournament, this one in the famous Wijk aan Zee – I lost to the Dutch grandmaster Nijboer, who played the following novelty in this position: 23...♘d5!? 24.♕d2 ♕h4 25.♘e3? (25. g3!?) 25...♖h5, after which I didn't play at all well...

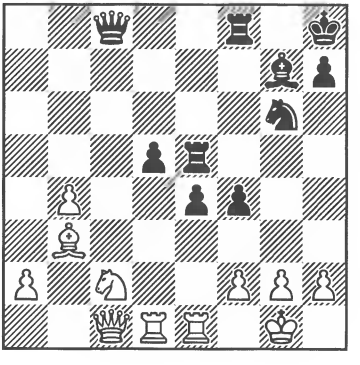
24.♖cd1

24.♖fd1? would be bad, owing to 24...♖e6, attacking the bishop at a6 and threatening ...♗h6.

24...f5 25.♗c4 ♔h8 26.♖fe1 ♕c8?!

26...♖e6!? looked interesting, with a complex game.

27.♗b3 ♘g6 28.♕c1 f4



29.♖xd5

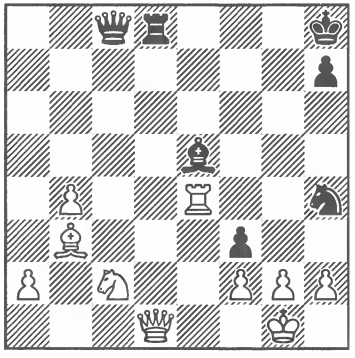
29.♗xd5 f3 30.♘e3 ♕xc1 31.♖xc1 ♘f4 32.♗b3 fxg2 threatens ...♖g5 and ... ♘h3#; the position is very complicated.

29...♘h4 30.♕d1

White must take control of g4, or else fall into a mating attack. 30.h3, with the same idea, would be bad, however, because of 30...♘xg2! 31.♔xg2 f3+ 32.♔h2 ♖xd5 33.♗xd5 ♗e5+ 34.♔g1 ♕xh3, forcing mate. And on 30.♖xe5 ♕g4, Black's attack would be very hard to stop.

30...f3 31.♖xe5 ♗xe5 32.♖xe4 ♖d8

The critical moment. White is up three pawns, but must make some accurate moves in time pressure.



33.♘d4!

Not fearing the pin. The computer fearlessly removes the queen to c1, or even to b1; but a human, especially a human player in time pressure, does not find it so easy to pull the pieces away from the king when it is under attack. For example: 33.♕b1!? ♘xg2 (33... ♕f5 34.♖xh4) 34.♖xe5 ♕g4, and after the quiet 35.♔f1 ♘f4 36.♘e3 ♕h3+ 37.♔g1!, White would have everything under control – Black cannot deliver mate here. White also repels the attack after 33.♕c1 ♕f5 (33...♘xg2 34.♖xe5 ♕g4 is no problem either, as long as White does not play 35.♖g5? ♕xg5!, but 35.h3 ♕g6 36.♕g5, keeping the extra material) 34.♖xh4 ♕g5 35.♖xh7+ ♔xh7 36.♘e3, but here, White has "only" three pawns for the exchange.

33...♗f6

Black has no way to exploit the pin. 33...♘f5 34.♖xe5 ♘xd4 35.♖e8+ ♔g7 36.♕xd4+ or 33...♘g6 34.♕c2 are very bad for him.

34.g3 ♘f5 35.♕xf3 ♖xd4 36.♖e6!

An attractive double attack. Black cannot defend both of his minor pieces simultaneously.

36...♖d2 37.♖xf6 ♘d4 38.♖f8+

Black resigned.

Women chessplayers often face the question of whether or not they should play in men's tournaments. On the one hand, competing in a strong men's competition, especially a round-robin, would be excellent training. On the other, it's far more difficult to win any kind of prizes playing against men. A few years ago, you could count the number of women's events on your fingers. But lately, individual and team events for women have multiplied; in fact, one could spend the whole year playing in nothing but women's events. Of course, as far as our professional development is concerned, competing in one men's round-robin can aid us far more than competing in three women's events. So I would recommend to young women that they regularly test their strength by playing not only against the girls, but against the boys, too.

As with the Hastings tournaments, the events held in the little Dutch town

of Wijk aan Zee at the end of January have a long history. Their atmosphere of a chess festival, held on the shores of the North Sea, is unique: the huge hall, filled with amateurs and professionals; the possibility of watching great players at the board – almost right next to you, in fact. The cold wind seems to drive passersby right into the warm tournament hall, where a blazing battle rages on every board.

For some, Wijk aan Zee might seem boring and the tournament a long and difficult trial. I, however, have always loved this tournament, and am glad to be playing in it. The first two times, in 1999 and 2000, I competed in the Open; in 2003, I received an invitation to play in the round-robin "B" tournament. The player who takes first place in the "B" group has the right to measure his strength in the following year against the grandmasters in the "A" super-tournament. So the list of participants even in the "B" tournament is always impressive. In 2003, it reached Category XI, with an average rating of 2525, which made it just below that of Hastings. But the Wijk aan Zee tournament is much longer – 13 rounds, with two rest days. Every year, the Wijk aan Zee organizers try to invite a mix of experienced players and young hopefuls. They also invite a few representatives of the fairer sex; thus, in 2003, in addition to myself, we had Humpy Koneru and Viktorija Cmilyte. Zhang Zhong, who scored 11 points out of 13, took undisputed first place; I shared 12th-13th places with 5 points. Here's one of my games, in which I scored a victory over Australian grandmaster Ian Rogers.

No. 21 Caro-Kann Defense B12

A. Kosteniuk – I. Rogers

Wijk aan Zee 2003

1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.e5

In my chess career, I have probably tried every possible setup against the Caro-Kann with White. Now, as in 2003, I prefer 3.e5.

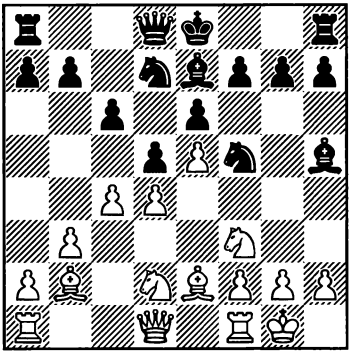
3...♗f5 4.♘f3

The sharp 4.♘c3!? has brought me a few memorable victories, among them a 10-minute game against Anatoly Karpov.

4...e6 5.♗e2 ♘d7 6.0-0 ♘e7 7.b3 ♗g4

Black more often begins an immediate fight for the center by 7...c5.

8.c4 ♘f5 9.♘bd2 ♗h5 10.♗b2 ♗e7



11.h3

Black's pieces have taken up rather unfortunate positions, and the ...c6-c5 break is now impossible. Therefore I decided to begin active operations.

11...♗g6 12.g4 ♘h6

Black probably should not have put the knight in such an unfortunate position. 12...♘h4 was better.

13.♘e1

The moves g4, ♘e1 and f4, taken together, were my favorite maneuver

Opening phase vs. GM Ian Rogers, Wijk aan Zee

then. Nowadays I would play more cautiously.

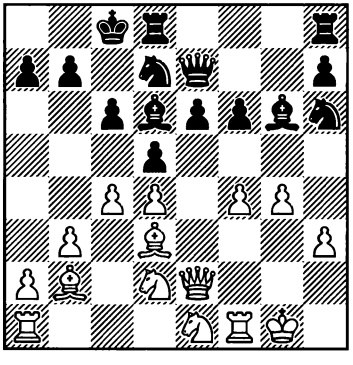
13...f5

Seeing that White is playing actively across the board, Black decides not to lag behind.

14.exf6 gxf6

On 14...♗xf6, I think that I would have continued 15.f4.

15.♗d3 ♗d6 16.f4 ♕e7 17.♕e2 0-0-0



18.c5 ♗c7 19.b4 ♘g8?!

Looking at this and the next move from Black, it would seem that he was beginning to put all his pieces back in their starting positions. However poorly the knight stood at h6, he should have left the g-file for his rook: 19...♖hg8 20.b5 cxb5 21.♖c1 leaves White with only a bit of initiative.

20.b5 ♘b8

The consequence of the passive ...♘g8: now Black finds it difficult to defend c6. For example: 20...cxb5 21.♗xb5 ♘b8 22.c6 ♘xc6 23.♗xc6 bxc6 24.♕a6+ ♔d7 25.♖c1 ♗b6 26.♗a3 ♕f7 27.f5 exf5 28.♘d3, with an attack.

21.♗xg6

21.a4!? was worth looking at.

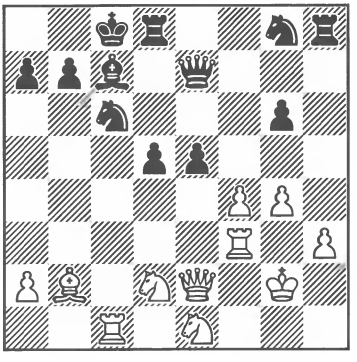
21...hxg6 22.♖f3 e5?

This central break leads to the opening of the c-file, which only helps White put together an attack. Generally speaking, opening up the game when your pieces

are so badly placed very rarely produces positive results.

22...cxb5 was much better – the idea being, after 23.♕xb5, to develop one of his knights by 23...♘c6, and on 24.♖b1 to continue 24...f5!, when after 25.g5 Black has the interesting idea 25...♗xf4!? 26.♖xf4 ♕xg5+ 27.♘g2 ♖xh3. In this position, the black pawns look much more dangerous than the bishop.

23.dxe5 ♕xc5+ 24.♔g2 fxe5 25.♖c1 ♕e7 26.bxc6 ♘xc6



27.♖xc6!

White takes immediate advantage of the opening of the c-file.

27...bxc6 28.♕a6+ ♔d7 29.fxe5

Black's poorly placed pieces can't get back to their king in time.

29...♖h7

29...♖b8 30.♘b3 ♗b6 31.♘d3 ♔e8 32.e6 ♖h7 33.♗a3 ♕g7 34.♘e5 wouldn't save him, either.

30.♘d3 ♖b8 31.♗a3 ♖b6 32.♕xa7

An even simpler win was 32.e6+ ♕xe6 33.♘c5+ ♔e8 34.♖f8+.

32...♕h4

On 32...♕g5, White finishes quickly with 33.♘c5+ ♔c8 34.♖f8+ ♗d8 35.♕a8+ ♖b8 36.♕a6+ ♔c7 37.♘e6+.

33.♗d6. Black resigned.

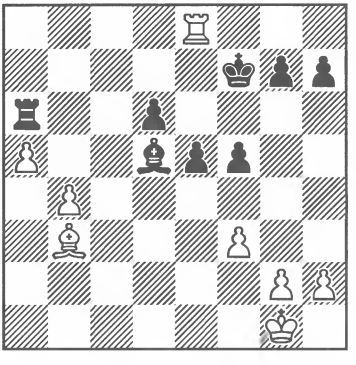
Soon after Hastings and Wijk aan Zee, I traveled to the Swiss village of Brissago for a 6-game match with Sergey Karjakin. The match was put together by the Dannemann cigar company. A year later, this same company would organize a World Championship Match between Vladimir Kramnik and Peter Leko, also in Brissago. I believe that Dannemann had plans to hold more chess events of various kinds, but the ban on advertising tobacco products put an end to all of them.

Brissago is a small town in Switzerland, located on the banks of Lago Maggiore, on the Italian border. We played in February, and the sunny weather, palm trees, and flowers were a pleasant change of scenery after Hastings and Wijk aan Zee. The playing conditions in Brissago turned out to be excellent. The Eden Roc Hotel, with its all-inclusive meal plan, remains to this day one of the best places I have ever been to.

Today, Sergey is one of the world's elite players; at that time, however, I was facing a 12-year-old kid – who still played a lot like a grown-up. The first two games were drawn, but then I lost the third game to Sergey with White. In the fourth game, I overlooked a pretty tactical shot.

S. Karjakin – A. Kosteniuk

Brissago 2003 (m/4)



Sergey Karjakin with Alexandra Kosteniuk, Brissago 2003

34.♖a8!

And all that Black could do was to resign.

In the fifth and sixth games, we again played to draws, so the final score of the match was 4-2 in Sergey's favor.

Despite the fact that I have played for Russia my entire life, am a patriot, and have always rooted and worried for my country, I have traveled a lot from my earliest years, lived in various cities and continents, and have by an almost imperceptible process become a citizen of the world. I visited many countries to promote chess, giving countless simultaneous exhibitions. Articles about me have appeared in magazines and newspapers in more than twenty languages. In some countries I get a very warm welcome – Switzerland, for example. This may be because my husband is Swiss. I should also note that my greatest fan, Lucio Barvas, lives there too.

Lucio is a chess arbiter. When you have friends like Lucio, every visit to a country becomes a little celebration, because you know that people are waiting for you and that they will cheer your successes.

In the summer of 2003, I competed in the Swiss Championship, held in Silvaplana, and also in the famous Biel Chess Festival. The following game from the Swiss Championship is an example of good opening preparation.

No. 22 Nimzo-Indian Defense E32
A. Huss – A. Kosteniuk
Silvaplana 2003

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 b6

My greatest fan, Lucio Barvas

At that time, I played neither the Nimzo- nor the Queen's Indian. But during preparation, we noticed that against the Queen's Indian, my opponent always played the Petrosian System. And after

4.♘c3 ♗b4

the system he used was not the most dangerous one for Black:

5.♕c2

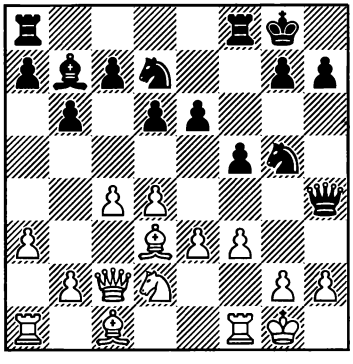
Instead, 5.♗g5 is considered more accurate. So, after looking over various setups in the Queen's Indian and preparing the novelty, which in fact was played in this game, I played this opening for the first time in my life.

5...♗b7 6.a3 ♗xc3+ 7.♕xc3 d6 8.e3 0-0 9.♗d3 ♘bd7

This variation attracted me because Black's plan is quite clear: ...♘e4, ...f7-f5, and "check, check and mate!"

10.0-0 ♘e4 11.♕c2 f5 12.♘d2 ♕h4 13.f3 ♘g5!

The most principled. My opponent had played this position with White before – and continued to play it afterwards. For instance: 13...♘xd2 14.♗xd2 ♖f6 15.♗e1 ♕h6 16.♕e2 e5 17.♗c3 ♖e8 18.♗c2 ♕h5 19.♗a4 ♕f7, draw (Huss-Razuvaev, Berne 1999).



14.f4?!

But he never played this move again. He tried 14.d5, also without success:

14...♖f6 15.f4 ♘h3+ 16.gxh3 (our game could have transposed into this position) 16...♖g6+ 17.♔h1 ♕xh3 18.♖f2 exd5 19.cxd5 (19.♘f3 d4 20.e4 fxe4 21.♗xe4 ♖e8 22.♗xb7 ♕xf3+ 23.♗xf3 ♖e1+ 24.♖f1 ♖xf1#) 19...♘f6 20.♘f3 (for the move 20.e4, see the note to move 16 in our game) 20...♘g4 21.♗c4 b5 22.♗b3 ♖e8 23.♕e2 ♘xf2+ 24.♕xf2 ♔h8 25.♘d4 ♖e4 26.♗a2? (White has a hard time holding on: Black's bishop at b7 is too powerful) 26...♖xd4! 27.exd4 ♕d3, and White resigned (Huss-Carron, Lausanne 2004).

14...♘h3+ 15.gxh3 ♖f6

In my preparations with Alexey Korotylev, who was assisting me at this tournament, we looked at this position, concluding that Black had a very dangerous attack, and that in a practical game White's chances of defending himself were virtually nil.

16.♘f3

Here are some of the variations we examined with Alexey before the game:

16.e4 ♖g6+ 17.♔h1 ♘f6! 18.d5 ♕xh3 19.♖f2 (19.♖g1 ♘g4 20.♘f1 ♕xd3 21.♕xd3 ♘f2#) 19...exd5 20.cxd5 (20.exd5 ♘xd5 21.cxd5 ♕g4 22.♘f3 ♗xd5 23.♗c4 ♕g1#) 20...♘g4 21.♘f3 ♘xf2+ 22.♕xf2 ♖e8, with a decisive attack;

16.♖f2 ♖g6+ 17.♔f1 ♕xh3+ 18.♔e2 ♘f6 19.♘b3 (19.d5 ♘g4 20.♖f3 ♕xh2+ 21.♔e1 ♕h4+ 22.♔d1 ♕h1+ 23.♗f1 exd5 24.♕d3 dxc4 25.♕xc4+ ♔h8) 19...♖g1 20.d5 ♖e8 21.♘d4 ♘g4 22.♘f3 ♘xf2 23.♘xg1 ♕g2 24.♕a4 ♖f8, and wins;

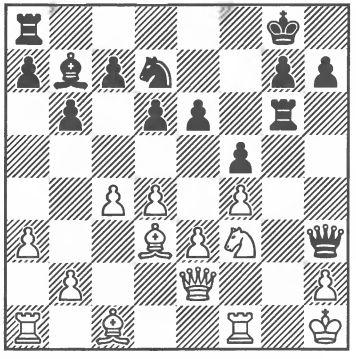
16.d5 leads, by transposition, back to a game my opponent went on to play a year later (see above).

16...♖g6+ 17.♔h1

17.♘g5 h6 18.e4 fxe4 19.♗xe4 ♗xe4 20.♕xe4 ♖xg5+ 21.♔h1 ♖e8 leaves Black with the better position.

17...♕xh3 18.♕e2

White loses by force after 18.♕f2 ♘f6 19.♗d2 ♘g4 20.♕g3 ♕h5 21.♗e2 ♘f6 22.♕e1 ♕h3.



And here, still in analysis, we discovered the following move:

18...♘c5!!

After the game, we found out that my opponent already had analyzed the position following White's move 18, but had not seen my powerful reply, after which White's position can no longer be held. The idea of this maneuver is to decoy White's d-pawn away from blocking off the powerful bishop at b7. If White ignores Black's knight, then Black immediately follows up with ...♘e4 and ...♘g3.

On 18...♖g3, White could have played 19.d5.

19.♗xf5

On 19.dxc5, 19...♖g3 is decisive; and on 19.♗c2, Black plays 19...♘e4 20.♗xe4 ♗xe4, followed by ...♖g3.

19...exf5 20.♗d2

Nor does 20.d5 ♘e4 21.♖g1 ♘g3+ 22.♖xg3 ♖xg3 23.♘g5 ♕h4 24.♗d2 ♖g4 save him.

20...♗e4

White resigned. The conclusion might have been: 21.dxc5 ♖g3 22.♖f2 ♖xf3 23.♖g2 ♖g3 24.♖ag1 dxc5.

After the Swiss Championship came my first trip to the Biel tournament. This city has two names: Biel and Bienne. The explanation for this is that Switzerland has four national languages: German, French, Italian, and Romansch. Biel is located exactly on the border between the French and German parts of Switzerland; hence its dual name, the one French, the other German.

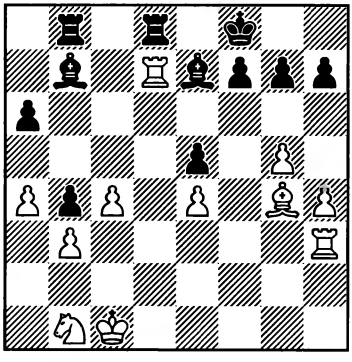
The Biel Festival has been held annually since 1968. In 1976, an international tournament was held alongside the festival, which was won by Bent Larsen, over such legends of chess as Tigran Petrosian, Mikhail Tal, Vassily Smyslov, Lajos Portisch, Efim Geller, and others. Among the local points of interest, in addition to the pretty lake, I can recommend the amazing Cabane pizzeria. I've never tasted better pizza in my life!

I played in Biel three years in a row – 2002, 2003 and 2004, and got to know this little town inside and out. In 2003, the very strong annual blitz tournament was held on the free day, and I took second place.

No. 23

A. Kosteniuk – O. Cvitan

Biel 2003



Dueling GM Ognjen Cvitan at the Biel chess festival

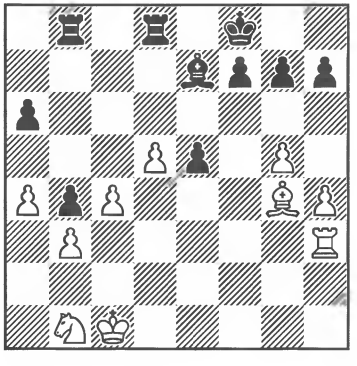
29.♖d5!

A Petrosian-style exchange sacrifice. In chess, along with an array of tactical combinations known worldwide, there exists also an equal array of standard strategic techniques. The larger a player's arsenal of such techniques, the higher the level of his chess mastery.

The positional sacrifice of material is one of the most subtle of battlefield techniques. Besides its strength on the chessboard, it often has a powerful psychological effect as well: the battle sharpens, and our opponent, who previously had a well-laid-out plan to develop his initiative, must quickly reorient himself to defense, which is not to everyone's taste.

29...♗xd5 30.exd5

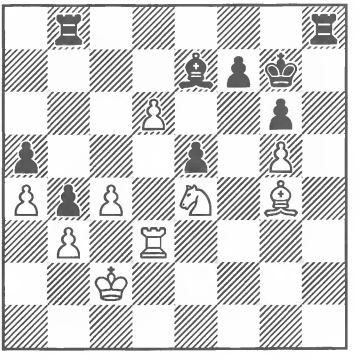
White's plan is obvious: in a few moves, the knight on b1 will reach a forward central post, and the white pawns will march forward. Black cannot sit and wait, so he tries to activate his pieces by opening the h-file.



30...g6 31.♘d2 h6 32.♘e4 hxg5 33.hxg5 ♔g7 34.♔c2 a5

The immediate 34...♖h8 would not stop the white pawns, in view of 35.♖xh8 ♖xh8 36.c5.

35.♖d3 ♖h8 36.d6



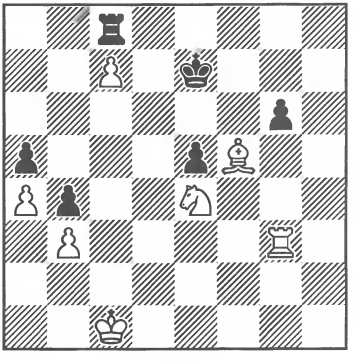
36...♗d8?

This is surrender. Fascinating complications could have arisen after 36...♗xg5! 37.♘xg5 f5 38.d7 ♔f6 39.♗e2 e4 (39...♖hd8 40.c5 ♖b7 41.c6 ♖c7 42.♖d6+ ♔xg5 43.♗b5 e4 44.♔d2, and White wins, or 39...♔xg5 40.c5 e4 41.♖d6!) 40.♖d6+! (40.♖d5 ♔xg5 41.c5 ♔f6 42.c6 ♔e6 43.♗c4 ♖bd8 44.c7 ♖xd7 45.♖c5+ ♔f6 46. c8♕ ♖xc8 47.♖xc8 f4 – Black can only be better here) 40...♔xg5 41.c5, and Black will have to give up at least one of his rooks.

37.c5 ♖h4

Here, after 37...♗xg5, Black would no longer be able to halt the march of White's pawns: 38.♘xg5 f5 39.d7 ♔f6 40.c6 ♔xg5 41.♗e2.

38.♖g3 ♗xg5 (desperation)**39.♘xg5 f5 40.d7 ♖h2+ 41.♔c1 ♔f6 42.c6 ♖hh8 43.c7 ♖bc8 44.♘e4+ ♔e7 45.dxc8♕ ♖xc8 46.♗xf5**



Black resigned, as he cannot avoid the exchange of rooks, when White will easily convert her extra knight: 46...gxf5 47.♖g7+; 46...♖xc7+ 47.♔d2 gxf5 48.♖g7+.

No. 24 Sicilian Defense B97

A. Kosteniuk – S. Dvoirys

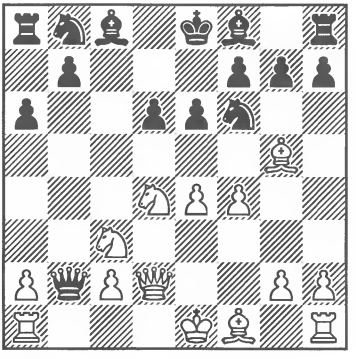
Biel 2003

This game is yet another example of a successful opening preparation. Generally speaking, in today's chess a game won at home is no longer newsworthy. To analyze a variation out to the win, and then to make use of it in a tournament, is now the rule. The endless analyses of opening variations go deep into the endgame, where we find the pre-canned Nalimov tablebases with their six-piece endings analyzed out to mate. Anyone with a good memory, who can force himself to work with computers a few hours a day, can achieve very good results simply by swotting up variations.

I don't know what will become of chess in another decade. I think we shall see more and more of the rapid and blitz tournaments, as well as Chess960 (Fischerandom), which I like a lot, because in those tournaments, independent play begins with the first moves, rather than reproducing opening variations that have been analyzed at home.

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 a6 6.♗g5 e6 7.f4 ♕b6 8.♕d2 ♕xb2

The well-known Poisoned Pawn Variation. At one time, taking the b2-pawn was thought to be dangerous – but that sort of assessment no longer exists in contemporary chess. Now there are only two conceivable answers: possible or impossible. For the moment, Black is holding on in all lines, although one incautious move can spell immediate defeat.



9.♘b3

The most popular continuation for White here is 9.♖b1.

9...♕a3 10.♗xf6 gxf6 11.♗e2 h5 12. 0-0 ♘c6 13.♔h1 ♗d7 14.♘d1 ♕b4?!

Perhaps my opponent mixed up his move orders a bit. A well-known game Short-Kasparov, London 1993, continued: 14...♖c8 15.♘e3 ♕b4 16.c3 ♕xe4! 17.♗d3 (17.♘c4!?) 17...♕a4 18.♘c4 ♖c7 19.♘b6 ♕a3 20.♖ae1 (20.♘c4 ♕a4 21.♘b6 with equality) 20...♘e7! 21.♘c4 ♖xc4, and Black went on to win.

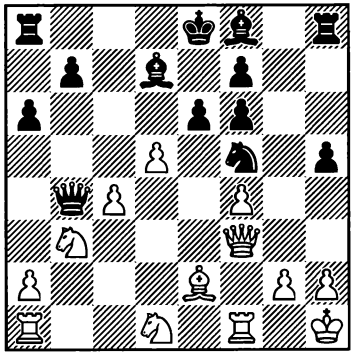
15.♕e3

But now, in view of the threatened a3 and ♘c3, trapping the queen, Black faces great difficulties.

15...d5?

Not wishing to wage a long and wearying defense, Black decides to take the bull by the horns. But this move only exposes the black king. 15...♘e7 was more stubborn; but thanks to the great difficulty Black will have in completing his development, White has more than enough for the pawn.

16.exd5 ♘e7 17.c4 ♘f5 18.♕f3



18...exd5?

It's as though Black doesn't even want to develop. It was not too late to remember the basic principles of opening play, and castle: 18...0-0-0.

19.♘e3 dxc4 20.♘d5 ♕d6 21.♘a5 h4?

The decisive error. He could still have held on after 21...♗c6 22.♘xc6 bxc6 23.♕e4+ ♘e7 (23...♗e7) 24.♘xe7 ♗xe7 – his position would be inferior, but there's still some play left.

22.♘xb7 ♕c6 23.♕e4+ ♘e7 24.♘d6+

Stronger still was 24.♖fd1 ♖b8 25.♖ab1!, or 24...♖c8 25.♘a5 ♕e6 26.♕xe6 fxe6 27.♘xf6+.

24...♕xd6 25.♘xe7. Black resigned.

In the summer of 2003, I graduated with honors from the Russian State University of Physical Education, Sport, and Tourism. Those notable college years, like my school days, turned into a short little moment of my life. Having completed my pre-college schooling at age 15, I attended regular classes at the Institute only in my freshman year. Beginning with my sophomore year, I transferred to a specialized sports curriculum requiring on-site attendance for only six weeks each semester, which gave top-level sportsmen the chance to combine their studies with tournament competition.

In general, the summer of 2003 was quite filled with non-chess activities. At the beginning of summer, I was invited to Moscow's first Vienna Ball. I spent a month taking dance lessons, learning to dance the waltz and cha-cha. Other débutantes at the 2003 ball included the noted singer Alsu and the famous gymnast Alina Kabaeva, who would take gold in artistic gymnastics at the Athens Olympiad in 2004, just a year after the Ball.

In life as in chess, I have often found myself a "pioneer." I was the first Russian woman chessplayer to appear in advertis-

College graduation, 2003

The Vienna Ball in Moscow, summer 2003

ing and modeling shoots; I was the first to achieve the men's grandmaster title; and I was the first from our country to bring home the Women's European and World Champion titles.

The premiere of the film, "Bless the Woman," took place that same summer. It's hard to express the emotions I felt when my own name appeared in the credits on the big screen of the Rossiya Theater. I'm very happy to have been able to see film-making from the inside; and I hope this will not be my last such experience.

In 2002 and 2003, I signed various advertising contracts with Western companies. The first was my contract with the Swiss watch company, Balmain. The newspaper *Commersant* published a big article, under the heading: "Russian Lady Chessplayer Runs Like a Watch." In the fall of 2003, my e-mail address – alexandra@kosteniuk.com, which gets over a hundred letters per day, received an interesting offer from the Korean company LG, offering to make me the public face of their computers, under the slogan, "The Choice of Champions." Filming for the advertising campaign took place in October 2003, and was just as entertaining as the movie sessions. I even preferred the advertising shoots, because they allowed me not a minute of idleness. We started shooting at 8 in the morning, and didn't stop until 2 o'clock at night. At the end of 2003, my advertising clips appeared on every channel throughout Russia and the countries of the former Soviet Union, and large advertising billboards appeared on the streets of the city, bearing my photograph and the words: "The Choice of Champions: Alexandra Kosteniuk, World Chess Champion (Under-12 and Under-14 Girls)." It was a strange thing

Advertising contracts with Balmain and LG

to be walking through Moscow and see the trolleys rolling by with my own smiling face on them. This advertising campaign lasted about a year, and to this day, it remains one of my biggest contracts.

After a busy summer, in the autumn of 2003 I played once again in the Young Masters tournament in Lausanne, and then for the Podgorica team, which won the European Cup in Crete.

In November 2003, I played on the Russian team in the European Team Championships in Plovdiv, Bulgaria. This European Championship was the last in which the women's teams consisted of only two main players plus one reserve. Alisa Galliamova played on our first board, Svetlana Matveeva on second, and I was the reserve.

We were leading for the entire tournament, until an unfortunate loss at the very end cost us the gold; we ended up taking the bronze. With $4\frac{1}{2}$ out of 6, I won the gold on my board. First place went to the Armenians. From Plovdiv, I remember a very tasty hot chocolate that was served at the local cafés; only at the close of the tournament did I learn that the monument that rises above the city is dedicated to the Russian soldiers who liberated parts of Europe from fascism in World War II.

Right after the Plovdiv championships, I flew to the United States, where I started to spend a lot of time after I got married. In America, I devoted most of my attention to staying in shape, running no less than 5 kilometers per day, and swimming about 1500 meters. I'm a very sports-inclined person by nature; so when I found that in Miami, where we lived, they had frequent amateur races, I decided to participate. Soon my "trophy shelf" began to be decorated not just with chess cups, but also with medals for races I had won. My personal best for 5 km is 21 minutes 30 seconds, which I set twice: first in April 2005, and then in March 2008.

Victory in a totally different field

Chapter 6
The Conquest of Europe

The year 2004 was yet another turning point in my chess career. It began quite successfully: I became European Women's Champion.

No. 25 Pirc-Ufimtsev Defense B06
M. Sebag – A. Kosteniuk
Dresden 2004

1.e4 d6

I did a lot of experimenting in Dresden, which is easily explained: I had not worked out a safe opening repertoire at home. A chessplayer must try to have most of her opening work done before leaving home, so as not to have to spend time at tournaments reviewing variations or wasting valuable time and energy learning new opening setups.

2.d4 g6 3.♘c3 ♗g7 4.♗e3 a6 5.♘f3 b5 6.a4?!

My unexpected opening choice surprised my opponent, judging from the time she had used up to this point as well as her extremely uncertain play. Here White does better to develop the bishop to d3, shoring up the center; only after this should she be thinking about starting action on the queenside.

6...b4 7.♘e2 ♗b7 8.♘g3 ♘d7

Here and later, White should have given serious thought to playing c2-c3, supporting her pawn center.

9.♕d2 c5 10.♗d3

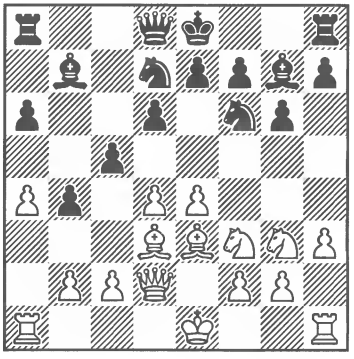
Here again, 10.c3 would have made sense.

10...♘gf6 11.h3?

This move was made instantly; and, as often happens with impulsive decisions, it

Black vs. Marie Sebag

turned out to be a mistake. It was not too late to play 11.c3 bxc3 12.bxc3.



11...d5!

Concrete thinking. White's minor pieces are poorly coordinated, so Black exploits this to free up her game and induce a series of favorable exchanges.

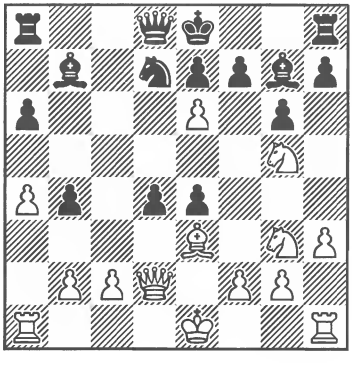
12.e5

After 12.exd5 ♘xd5, Black's bishops are freed, and White would have to start looking for a way to equalize.

12...♘e4 13.♗xe4 dxe4 14.♘g5 cxd4

14...h6 was more cautious; but I thought that after such a strangely played opening, White would hardly be able to threaten anything. In fact, after 15.♘5xe4 cxd4 16.♗xd4 ♘xe5, Black's chances look only a little better (thanks to the bishop pair in an open position); and I was sure that I could try for more.

15.e6

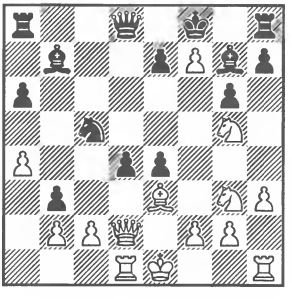


15...f5!?

At first I had planned to play 15...♘e5 here; but I soon saw that Black would lose after 16.exf7+ ♘xf7 17.♘e6. Nor does 15...fxe6 16.♗xd4 ♗xd4 17.♕xd4 ♘f6 18.♕xb4 ♕d5 19.♖d1 ♕xg5 20.♕xb7 ♔f7 promise a whole lot.

The best continuation in this position was 15...♘c5; but I couldn't resist playing the prettiest move instead. After 15...♘c5! the game might continue: 16.exf7+ ♔f8 17.♖d1 b3.

17...a5 is also very interesting, since White cannot now play 18.0-0? because of 18...h6, when the White knight is in trouble. 18.♗xd4 is stronger, but here too, after something like 18...♗xd4 19.♕xd4 ♕xd4 20.♖xd4 h6 21.♘5xe4 ♘xe4 22.♘xe4 e5 23.♖c4 ♗d5 24.♘d2 ♗xc4 25.♘xc4 ♔xf7 26.♘xe5+ ♔f6 27.♘g4+ ♔g7, Black has the better chances:



1) 18.♗xd4 ♕xd4 19.♕xd4 ♗xd4 20.♖xd4 bxc2, with advantage to Black;

2) 18.0-0 h6 19.♕b4,

2a) 19...hxg5 20.♗xd4 (here 20.♖xd4 ♗xd4 21.♗xd4 bxc2 22.♗xh8 ♖c8 23.♕c3 ♘e6 is not dangerous to Black – in fact, I have the upper hand) 20...♗xd4 21.♖xd4 ♕c7 22.♖c4 ♖c8 23.cxb3 ♔xf7 24.♖xc5 (24.♖fc1? loses to 24...♘d3) 24...♕xc5 25.♕xb7, with an unclear position;

2b) 19...bxc2 20.♖xd4 (here 20.♗xd4 is simply unplayable, owing to 20...cxd1♕) 20...♗xd4 21.♗xd4 hxg5 22.♗xh8 (22.♗xc5 ♖c8 23.♕c3 ♔xf7 favors Black) 22...♕d5 23.♕c3 ♔xf7 24.f3 (24.♕g7+ ♔e8 is not dangerous for Black) 24...exf3 25.♕g7+ ♔e8 26.♕xg6+ ♔d7 27.♕xc2 ♘d3 28.gxf3 ♖xh8 29.♖d1 ♕d4+ 30.♔h2 (30.♔f1? a5! 31.♕xd3 ♗a6) 30...♖xh3+ 31.♔xh3 ♘f2+ 32.♕xf2 ♕xd1.

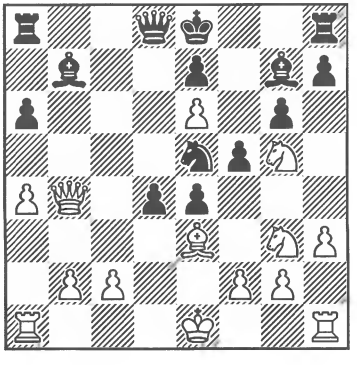
These variations show that the position was very interesting; however, the stronger side here was indisputably Black.

16.♕xb4

After 16.exd7+ ♕xd7 17.♖d1 e5 (17...h6 was also possible; but the very idea of surrendering my beautiful pawn chain after 18.♗xd4 was horrifying to me) 18.♕xb4 h6 19.♘e6 ♕xe6 20.♕xb7 0-0, Black has the advantage. This was the position I would have aimed for after 16.exd7.

On 16.♗xd4, I had intended 16...♘e5 17.♘f7 (for 17.♕xb4, see 16.♕xb4) 17...♘xf7 18.♗xg7 ♕xd2+ 19.♔xd2 0-0-0+! (it was when I saw this move that I decided to play 15...f5!?) 20.♔e1 ♖hg8, with advantage to Black.

16...♘e5

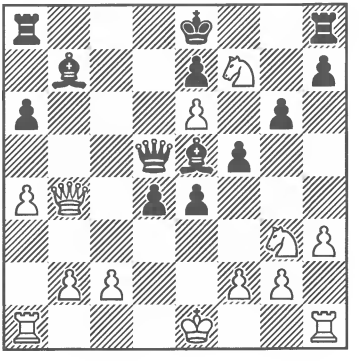


17.♗f4?

Undoubtedly the strongest continuation, and the one I had most expected, was 17.♗xd4, for example: 17...♘c6 18.♕xb7 ♘xd4 19.0-0 0-0 (19...♕c8 20.♕d5 0-0 21.c3 ♖d8 22.♕a2, with a complex game) 20.c3 ♖b8 21.♕xa6 ♘b3 22.♖ad1 ♘d2. The position is still unclear, but after something like 23.♘f7 ♕d5 24.c4 ♕d4, White is certainly not worse.

On 17.0-0-0, I had thought of playing 17...♗d5 (my computer suggests 17...♕c7 or 17...♕c8) 18.♘f7 (18.♗xd4 ♘c6 19.♕c5 ♘xd4 20.♖xd4 ♗xd4 21.♕xd4 0-0 22.♘f7 ♖xf7 23.exf7+ ♗xf7 24.♕xd8+ ♖xd8, and my pawns still look very good) 18...♘xf7 19.exf7+ ♔xf7 20.♗xd4 ♖b8, when Black's chances are somewhat better.

17...♕d5 18.♗xe5 ♗xe5 19.♘f7



19...♗xg3

Here I used up a lot of time trying to figure out whether 19...♗xg3 or 19...♗c7 was better. In the latter case, the game might continue 20.0-0-0 (20.0-0?! ♗a5) 20...0-0. Black's idea is that after 21.♕xe7, she plays 21...♗f4+ (taking control of the h6 square) 22.♔b1 ♗c8. Black has the advantage; but I could not evaluate the position after 21.♘e2, so I decided to play 19...♗g3 instead.

20.fxg3

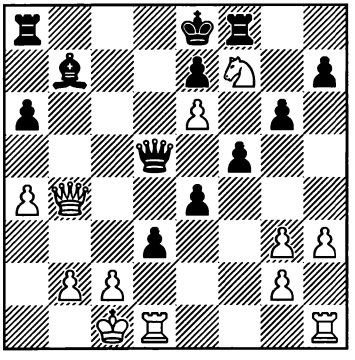
20.♘xh8 is obviously too risky for White; but I would have had to find at least one exact way of demonstrating this: 20...♗xf2+ 21.♔xf2 e3+ 22.♔e1 ♕xg2 23.♖f1 ♗f3 24.♖xf3 ♕xf3, and wins.

20...♖f8

Unfortunately, 20...0-0 would just be bad, owing to 21.♕xe7.

21.0-0-0 d3

Now the pawn chain stretches from h7 to d3 – this deserves a diagram!

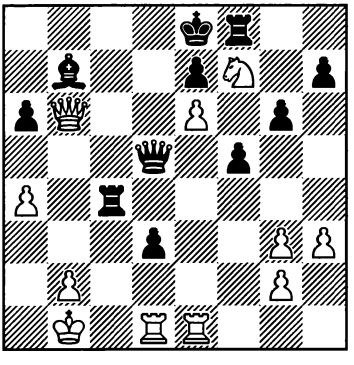


22.cxd3 exd3 23.♖he1

23.♖xd3 ♖c8+ 24.♖c3 ♕xe6 25.♘g5 ♕e3+ favors Black.

23...♖c8+ 24.♔b1 ♖c4 25.♕b6

25.♕b3 was also possible, although at first I believed White could not play it because of 25...♖c1+, failing to notice the reply 26.♔a2. So Black would do better to play 25...♖e4.



25...♖xf7

I used up all my time here (and I started with just 6 minutes) trying to find a winning continuation after 25...d2 26.♖e3 f4 27.gxf4 ♖c1+ 28.♖xc1 ♕f5+ 29.♔a2 dxc1♘+ 30.♔a3, but I could not – because there wasn't one there to find. I didn't see the move 27...♖c6, but that doesn't win either: 28.♕b3 ♕xb3 (28...♖xe6 is probably best here, but of course, that would not be the forcing continuation I was looking for) 29.♖xb3 ♖c1+ 30.♖xc1 ♗e4+ 31.♖c2 d1♕+. Black has achieved what she wanted; unfortunately, her king is too exposed. After 32.♔a2 ♗b7 33.♖xb7 ♕d5+ 34.♖b3 ♕xe6 35.♘g5, White would even stand better.

25...♖xa4?! isn't any good, either: White's chances are preferable after 26.♖e5! ♕a2+ 27.♔c1 ♕c4+ 28.♔d2 ♕c2+ 29.♔e1.

After all my vain attempts to find a forced win, leaving myself with only a minute on the clock, I decided to play it safe.

26.exf7+ ♔xf7 27.♖e3

The first move I looked at was 27.♕e3, to which I had intended to reply 27...♕d6 28.♕h6 ♔g8, with an unclear game.

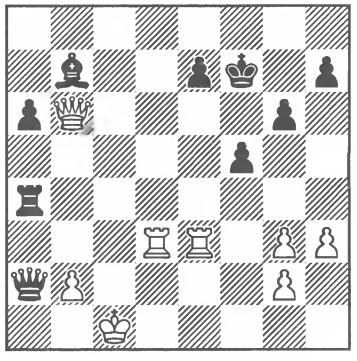
27...♖xa4

I did not play 27...d2, thinking that White had set a trap. Only later did I see that, after 28.♖xd2 (28.b3 is best; if 28.♕b3, then 28...♖c1+! – the point! – 29.♖xc1 ♕xb3 30.♖xb3 ♗e4+ wins) 28...♕xd2 29.♕e6+ ♔g7 30.♕xe7+ ♔h6, Black wins.

28.♖dxd3

28.b3 ♖d4 29.♖de1 ♖e4 would be good for Black.

28...♕a2+ 29.♔c1



29...♕c4+!

I was very proud to find this move with just seconds left on my clock. Of course, the move does not win; but it's better than 29...♗e4, since it gives White a chance to go wrong. Unfortunately for my opponent, she decided that the time had come at last for her to play for the win, and she blundered.

After 29...♗e4, the queens are exchanged, and we reach the same ending that White could have reached in the game with accurate play: 30.♕b3+ ♖c4+ 31.♔d2 ♕xb3 32.♖xb3 ♖c2+ 33.♔e1 ♖xg2. Black is still a little better, but with the sudden-death time control in effect, any result would have been possible.

30.♖c3??

30.♔d2 ♗e4 31.♖c3 ♕d5+ 32.♔e2 ♖d4 33.♕xa6 (33.♕b3 ♖d2+ 34.♔e1 ♕xb3 35.♖xb3 ♖xg2, with Black having a little the better of it) 33... ♖d2+ 34.♔e1 ♖xg2 35.♕c4 ♕xc4 36.♖xc4 ♖xb2, and Black is just a tiny bit better.

30...♕f1+ 31.♔c2

31.♔d2 ♕f2+!, and the pin on the rook at e3 makes this a winning position for Black.

31...♗e4+ 32.♖xe4

Here I almost did what I am always scolding myself for doing: making a move without thinking, even though I now had sufficient time. Fortunately, I saw that instead of 32...♖xe4, I had a much stronger move.

32...♕xg2+!

And the rest was simple.

33.♔b3 ♕xe4 34.♖c7 a5 35.♖xe7+ ♔xe7 36.♕c7+ ♔f8 37.♕d8+ ♕e8 38.♕xe8+ ♔xe8 39.♔xa4 g5

Or 39...h5 40.b4 h4.

40.b4 f4 41.gxf4 gxf4 42.bxa5 ♔d7 43.a6 ♔c6

White resigned.

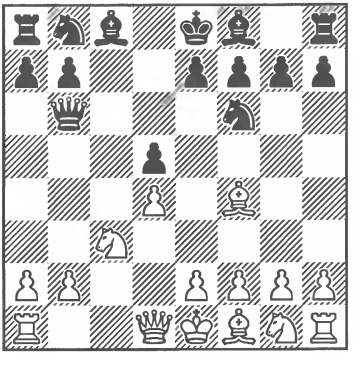
No. 26 Queen's Gambit – Slav Exchange D10

A. Stefanova – A. Kosteniuk

Dresden 2004

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.cxd5 cxd5 4.♘c3 ♘f6 5.♗f4 ♕b6

My opponent spent an hour on her next two moves, which looks pretty dubious for a 90-minute game. I was still more surprised to learn, after the game, that Antoaneta had already had this position – with Black.



Awaiting Antoaneta Stefanova's next move

6.♖c1

The most frequent continuation here is 6.e3. White gets very good compensation for the b-pawn; but a pawn is still a pawn, and Black could always hope to wriggle her way out, while holding on to the extra material.

6...♗d7 7.♕d2

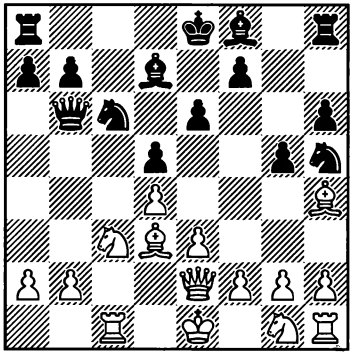
Here again, 7.e3 is possible.

7...♘c6 8.e3 e6 9.♗d3

After White decided to keep her b-pawn, we arrived at a normal position for this variation, but with a few extra tempi for Black, since White has played ♖c1 and ♕d2, instead of ♘f3 and ♗d3.

9...♘h5 10.♗g5 h6 11.♗h4 g5 12.♕e2?

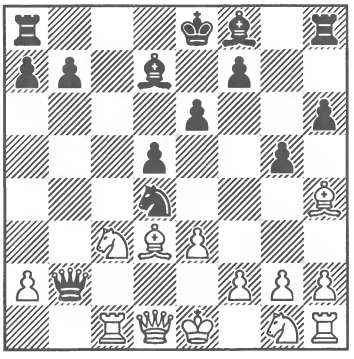
After 12.♗g3 ♘xg3 13.hxg3 ♗g7, the position remains unclear, and playable for both sides.



12...♘xd4!

Surprise! Sometimes it's obvious that a position contains some sort of tactical solution. It's surprising that in such a quiet opening as the Exchange Slav, as early as move 12 Black should have a tactical solution giving her the upper hand.

13.♕xh5 ♕xb2 14.♕d1



14...♖c8!

To be quite honest, I did not see this continuation when I made my 12th move. I had planned to play 14...♗a3 15.exd4 ♕xc1 16.♕xc1 ♗xc1 17.♗g3, thinking that in any case, the position would be better for Black. But my feeling that after 12...♘xd4, Black had something more than this, proved to be correct. Soon after 14.♕d1, I saw that 14...♖c8 was quite playable, because after

15.♕d2

(on 15.exd4 ♖xc3 16.♖b1 ♕a3, Black wins), I have

15...♗a3!

which I had not previously noticed.

16.♖b1 ♕xc3 17.♕xc3 ♖xc3 18.♔d2 ♖c8 19.♗g3

I was expecting 19.exd4.

19...♘c6 20.♖xb7 ♘b4 21.♗e5 ♘xd3

I could also have played 21...♗c6 22.♖xa7 ♘xd3 23.♔xd3 ♗b5+ 24.♔d2 ♗b4+ 25.♔d1 0-0; but I had another idea, that looked very interesting to me.

22.♔xd3 ♖h7

22...f6 deserved consideration.

23.♖xa7 ♗b5+

The idea behind bringing the rook to h7 was to follow up with 23...f6, when after 24.♖xa3 fxe5, White has great difficulties developing her kingside. Unfortunately, at this point I discovered the variation that occurred in the game, but without noticing White's move 30.

24.♔d2 ♗c5

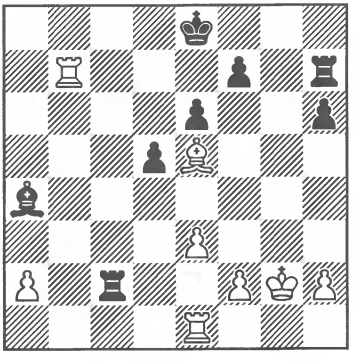
24...♗b4+ 25.♔d1 ♗f1 would have been much simpler, but I thought this would win too.

25.♖b7 ♗b4+ 26.♔d1 ♗a4+ 27.♔e2 ♖c2+ 28.♔f3 g4+ 29.♔g3 ♗e1

The point of Black's idea. Only here did I notice that White could simply check. The fact that I could still avoid the draw made me very happy: 30.♖b8+ ♔e7 31.♖b7+ ♗d7.

30.♘h3 gxh3 31.♖xe1 hxg2 32.♔xg2

Here, the rook's position at h7, and my king's position, caused me considerable annoyance. In other words, the game began all over again, without a shred of the advantage Black had enjoyed coming out of the opening.



32...♗c6 33.♖c7

White could have tried weaving a mating net after 33.♖a7 d4+ (this is the move I probably would have played, even though in this position it was time to start thinking about making a draw. However, I still remembered that, a

few moves back, I had been winning) 34.♔h3 d3 35.♖g1 ♗d7 36.♗f6 e5+ 37.♔h4 ♖c4+ 38.f4.

33...d4+ 34.♔g3?!

34.♔h3 was much stronger, since the rook might end up needing the open g-file. In that case White's prospects would have been much superior. But she had no more than a minute left, and it's impossible to expect accuracy under such circumstances.

34...d3 35.♗f6

When I made my 32nd move, I was happy that after 35.♖b1, I still had a defense against mate, by 35...♗d7 36.♖b8+ ♔e7; after 37.♖b3 ♖xc7 38.♗xc7, however, Black would still have had to fight for the draw.

35...♗d7 36.♖a7 h5 37.♖b1 ♖h6 38.♖a8+ ♗c8 39.♗h4 e5

At last I could breathe a sigh of relief – my rook is back in the game!

40.e4 ♖d6 41.♗g5 d2 42.♖d1 ♔d7 43.♖a7+ ♔c6 44.♖xf7 ♗a6 45.♖f5

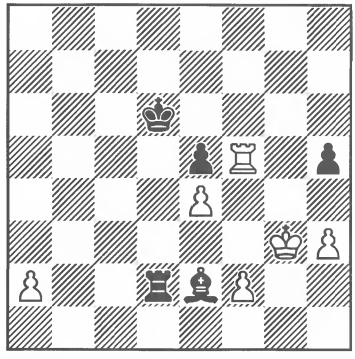
After 45.♔f3, I did not see anything decisive during the game.

45...♗e2 46.♖xd2 ♖cxd2 47.♗xd2 ♖xd2 48.h3?

After 48.♖xe5, I was preparing myself for the long ♖+♗ vs. ♖ endgame, by trying to recall the Philidor position. Black still has one pawn, but a draw seems the most likely outcome. For example: 48...♖d3+ 49.♔h4 ♗g4 (49...♗f3 50.a4 ♔d6 [50...♖a3 51.a5 ♔d6 52.♖b5] 51.♖d5+ ♖xd5 52.exd5 ♔xd5 53.a5 ♔c5 54.♔g3 ♗d5 55.f4 ♔b5 56.f5 ♗f7 57.♔f4, with equality) 50.f4 ♖h3+ 51.♔g5 ♖xh2 52.a4 ♖g2 53.a5 ♗f3+ 54.♔h4 ♖g6 55.♖g5 ♖e6 56.♖e5, with a draw.

48...♔d6

Here I had two pawns left, which made my life a lot easier.



49.f3 ♖d3 50.a4 h4+ 51.♔g4 ♖e3

The rest is simple enough.

52.a5 ♖xe4+ 53.♔g5 ♖a4 54.f4 e4 55.♖e5 ♗f3 56.♔xh4 ♖a3 57.♔g3 ♗d1+ 58.♔g2 e3 59.h4 e2 60.♔f2 ♖f3+ 61.♔e1 ♖xf4 62.♖e8 ♖xh4 63.a6 ♖h1+ 64.♔d2 ♖h7 65.♖d8+ ♔c6 66.♖c8+ ♔b6 67.♖e8 ♔xa6 68.♖e5 ♔b6 69.♖e8 ♔c6 70.♔e1 ♔d7 71.♖e3 ♖e7 72.♖d3+ ♔e8 73.♖h3 ♗a4 74.♖h8+ ♔d7 75.♖a8 ♗b5 76.♖a7+ ♔d6 77.♖a3 ♖f7 78.♖e3 ♖f1+

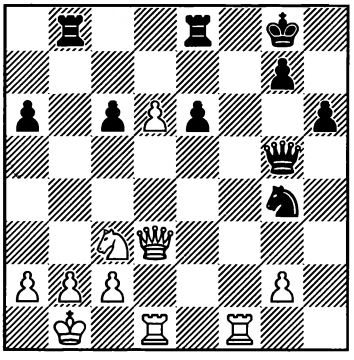
White resigned.

The following game was played in the last round of the European Championship. I shared first and second places with the Dutch player Peng, who won her last-round game confidently. In order to have the chance to play a tiebreaking match against her for the title of European Women's Champion, I had to win too. But I was paired against Tatiana Kosintseva, and got into a very difficult position immediately out of the opening, where the most I could wish for was a draw.

No. 27

T. Kosintseva – A. Kosteniuk

Dresden 2004



22.d7 ♖ed8 23.♕d6?

This gives Black's knight a chance to get into the game. 23. ♘e4 was better.

23...♘e3 24.♕xe6+ ♔h8 25.♕xc6 ♘xf1?

Passing on the chance to draw by 25... ♖xb2+ 26.♔xb2 ♖b8+ 27.♘b5 ♖xb5+ 28.♕xb5 ♘xd1+ 29.♖xd1 ♕xb5+ 30.♔a1 ♕e5+ 31.c3 ♕xc3+ 32.♔b1 ♕b4+, with perpetual check.

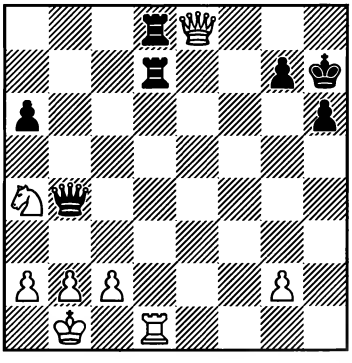
26.♖xf1 ♕a5 27.♖d1 ♖b6 28.♕c8 ♖b8 29.♕c6 ♖b6 30.♕c8 ♖b8 31.♕c4?

Of course, White should have taken the draw, which would have cost me my shot at the gold medal. But women players aren't famous for their fighting spirit for nothing: the game is always played out to the last pawn, and agreeing to a draw is considered a sign of weakness.

31...♖b7 32.♕e4 ♕b4 33.♕e8+??

The fatal error: 33.♕xb4 ♖xb4 34.♖d6 ♖f4 35.a4 ♖f6 36.♖d5 ♖f7 37.♖a5 would lead to an approximately equal ending.

33...♔h7 34.♘a4 ♖bxd7



The last round is the most important one. Facing off against Tatiana Kosintseva

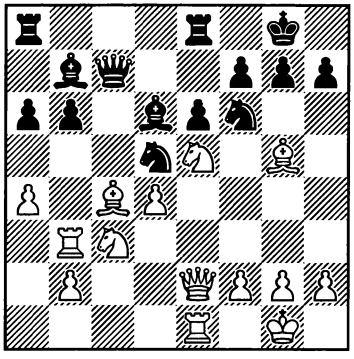
White resigned.

After my last-round win, Peng and I shared first and second places. The title of Women's European Champion was decided the following day in a tiebreaker.

No. 28

Peng Zhaoqin – A. Kosteniuk

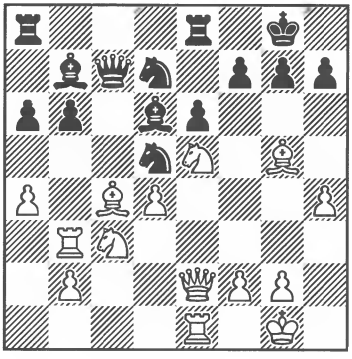
Dresden 2004 (m/1)



This game decided the championship. Had Peng found the winning continuation in the following diagrammed position, I don't know how the tiebreaker would have ended. But after victory in this first game, I drew the second one without any particular trouble, and became Champion of Europe.

18.h4 ♘d7?

18...h6 was correct.



I think this was the decisive moment that determined the next European Champion.

19.♘xd7?

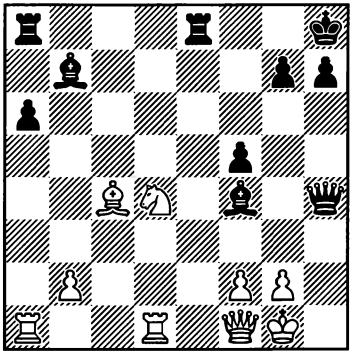
The tiebreak with Peng Zhaoqin determines the 2004 Women's European Champion

After this move, I ceased to worry about the outcome of the game. During play, I felt that my last move had been a mistake; but in an attempt to console myself, I calculated the following variation: 19.♘xf7 ♔xf7 20.♘xd5 ♗xd5 21.♗xd5 exd5 22.♕h5+ ♔f8 23.♖f3+ ♘f6. Here I broke off my calculations, in view of White's first-rank weakness. However, I would have had to resign after 24.♖xf6+.

19...♕xd7 20.♘e4 ♗c7 21.♖a1 ♕c6 22.♗d3 f5 23.♖c1 ♕xa4 24.♖a3 ♕d7

I might have tried to play for complications by 24...♕xd4 25.♖c4 ♕e5 26.f4 ♘xf4 27.♗xf4 ♕xf4 28.♘f6+ gxf6 29.♖xf4 ♗xf4. Black's position is still much superior; but for a 15-minute game, the battle's outcome is not yet clear.

25.♘c3 ♘f4 26.♗xf4 ♗xf4 27.♖d1 b5 28.♖aa1 ♕c6 29.d5 exd5 30.♕f1 d4 31.♘xb5 ♕f6 32.♗c4+ ♔h8 33.♘xd4 ♕xh4



White resigned.

Starting in the early '70s, all professional chessplayers (and these days, several thousand amateurs, as well) have had an individual rating, or "Elo coefficient," named after the Hungarian-American

The winners of the European Championship, Dresden 2004. Left to right: Peng Zhaoqin (silver), Alexandra Kosteniuk (gold), Antoaneta Stefanova (bronze)

professor Arpad Elo. Depending on your results in a particular tournament, your rating will rise or fall. But there is one more important mathematical indicator, characterizing a player's performance in a particular event, and that is the "performance rating." This shows how much your actual score in the tournament differs from the expected result (that is, the number of points you would need to score in order to leave your rating unchanged).

After the 2625 performance rating I turned in at the European Championships, I was awarded the men's grandmaster title, becoming the tenth woman in the history of chess to attain this status. The first woman to become a men's grandmaster was Nona Gaprindashvili, who received her title in 1978. In 1984, Maia Chiburdanidze became the second woman grandmaster. Eventually, this respected title would be won by Judit and Zsuzsa Polgar, Xie Jun, Pia Cramling, Zhu Chen, Humpy Koneru, and Antoaneta Stefanova. Today, 20 women hold the men's grandmaster title.

After my success in the European Championship, my rating on the July 1, 2004 list was 2511.

In May 2004, Elista hosted the Women's World Championship. This time, I was already considered a candidate for a high-placed finish, but lost in the second round to Viktorija Cmilyte of Lithuania.

In a career, just as in life, everyone has turning points: encounters and instances wherein everything changes. Now, when I look back on the path I have traveled, it seems to me that I've had several such moments. The first, and most important, was of course when Daddy decided to teach me chess. Competing in the 1998 World Chess Olympiad was undoubtedly also one of the key moments in my chess career. The year 2004 was also a very important one for my further growth as a chessplayer.

Returning from the World Championship in Elista, on the plane to Moscow I fell into conversation with grandmaster Yuri Razuvaev. Right away, he asked if I planned to continue playing chess, and to work at it. Because it had been three years since the 2001 World Championship, and my results – and more importantly, my playing strength – had not changed significantly since then.

Here I must note that I had already known Yuri Sergeyevich for a long time. In 1992 and 1993, I had attended some sessions at Razuvaev's school, where I had enjoyed the lectures given by Yuri Sergeyevich and other grandmasters. I also spent time with the other kids my age, and played soccer and other sports. Yuri had long worked and spent time with Mikhail Botvinnik, the patriarch of the Soviet chess school. Thus, the work in Yuri Sergeyevich's school was set up along the same lines as Botvinnik's. In the difficult years of the '90s, unfortunately, the Razuvaev School could not survive for long. It was one of the last of the great chess schools that did so much to help young players grow, and formed an important link in the chain, handing down experience. It was just this link in the chain that we lost for a while in the early 'Nineties, and the Russian juniors' current results in junior championships are ample testimony to this.

In July 2004, Yuri and I reached an agreement to work together; after the Calvià 2004 Olympiad, we held our first sessions. These exercises were unquestionably priceless to me, not only

The latest honor: the 2004 European Women's Cup

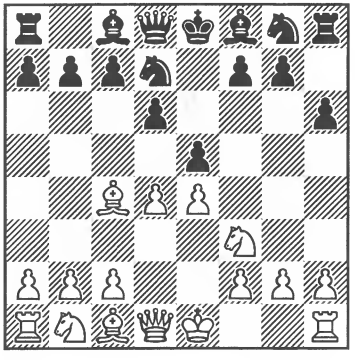
because of the chess wisdom that I received but also thanks to Razuvaev's advice; in addition, Yuri convinced me that there was nothing to prevent me from reaching a high level and competing successfully in men's tournaments. These words, from a chess specialist I respected so highly, helped to prevent me from cutting short my chess career (and I admit that such thoughts had already begun to appear) and to decide instead to keep working toward making myself a better player.

In the summer of 2004, I was invited to take part in a women's rapid tournament in Warsaw, at which I made friends with Almira Skripchenko. Today I find it hard to imagine that there was a time when Elia and I played in the same tournaments, and yet were not friends. One of our games in Warsaw featured the following incident:

No. 29. Philidor's Defense C41
A. Kosteniuk – A. Skripchenko
Warsaw 2004

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 ♘d7 4.♗c4 h6?

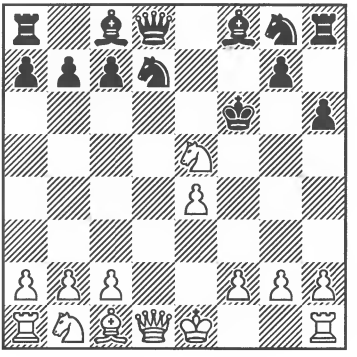
Philidor's Defense is a solid enough opening; here, however, Black evidently got something mixed up.



5.dxe5 dxe5?

5...♕e7 6.e6 fxe6 7.0-0 would have held out longer. White is ahead in development, while Black has weaknesses along the h5-e8 diagonal and on the e6 square. Depending on how her opponent plays, White can exploit these weaknesses either by ♘f3-d4 and f2-f4-f5, or by playing e4-e5.

6.♗xf7+! ♔xf7 7.♘xe5+ ♔f6



Here I did not have enough knowledge of the opening to continue 8.♘c3! ♔xe5 (other moves are no better, for example: 8...c6 9.♕d4 c5 [9...♔e6 10.♘g6]; 8...♗b4 9.♕d4 ♗xc3+ 10.bxc3 ♔e6 11.♕d5+ ♔f6 12.♕f7+ ♔xe5 13.♗f4+ ♔xe4 14.f3#, Skatchkov-Krovelschikov, Tomsk 2001; 8...♗c5 9.♕f3+ ♔xe5 10.♕f5+ ♔d6 11.♗f4+ ♔e7 12.♘d5+ ♔e8 13.♘xc7+ ♕xc7 14.♗xc7, with a winning position; or 8...♘e7 9.♕d4 ♔e6 10.f4, and White's attack is unstoppable) 9.♕d5+ ♔f6 10.♕f5+ ♔e7 11.♘d5+ ♔d6 12.♗f4+ ♔c6 13.♕e6+ ♗d6 14.♘b4+ ♔b6 (or 14...♔b5 15.a4+ ♔a5, Herbrechtsmeier-H. G. Schmidt, Germany 1993, 16.♕c4 c6 17.♘d5, and wins) 15.♗xd6 cxd6 16.♕xd6+ ♔a5 17.♘d5 b6 18.c4 ♔a6 19.♕c6 ♕g5 20.♘c7+ ♔a5 21.b4+, and mate is forced.

Friends and competitors: With Almira Skripchenko in Warsaw and Moscow

In the game against Almira, I continued with **8.♕d4,** and in the end, after some less-than-perfect play, we settled for the draw: **8...c5 9.♘xd7+ ♔e7 10.♕xc5+ ♔xd7 11.♕b5+ ♔e7 12.♘c3 ♔f7 13.♗e3 ♘f6 14.e5 ♘g4 15.0-0 ♕h4 16.h3 ♘xe3 17.fxe3+ ♔g8 18.♕b3+ ♔h7 19.♘d5 ♕g5 20.♖f7 ♗xh3 21.♕d3+ ♔g8 22.♘f4 ♔xf7 23.♘xh3 ♕xe5 24.♖f1+ ♔g8 25.♕c4+ ♔h7 26.♕d3+ ♔g8 27.♕c4+ ♔h7 28.♕d3+**. Here, in view of 28...♔g8 29.♕c4+, we agreed to a draw.

By 2004, the Russian Women's Championship had lost its former prestige, due to the loss of the Zonal and Interzonal tournaments (for which it had served as a qualifier). In an effort to bring back all the strongest players, the Russian Chess Federation decided to make team selections entirely dependent on the outcome of one event: the team would be made up of the championship's first four prizewinners. It was an interesting decision, with positive and negative sides to it. Regardless of the merits, the Kazan Championship drew a very strong field. Besides myself, Kazan featured Tatiana and Nadezhda Kosintseva, Alisa Galliamova, Ekaterina Kovalevskaya, Svetlana Matveeva, Ekaterina Polovnikova, Tatiana Stepovaia, Tatiana Shumiakina, Irina Slavina, and Elena Zaiatz. And for the first time in a long time, the Final was also labeled a Superfinal, and would be conducted as a 12-player round-robin.

Since the tournament was to be held in June, and my spring schedule of events was pretty full, I played this championship on my last reserves. It started well: I won my first game convincingly.

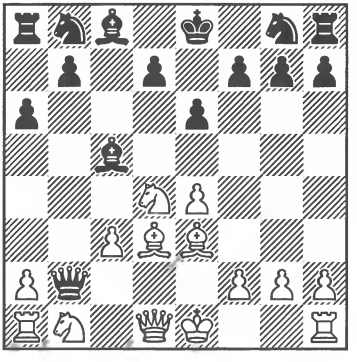
No. 30 Sicilian Defense B42

A. Kosteniuk – I. Slavina

Kazan 2004

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 a6 5.♗d3 ♗c5 6.♗e3 ♕b6 7.c3 ♕c7

What happens after 7...♕xb2? Some years later, I managed to catch grandmaster Ilya Smirin in this opening trap:



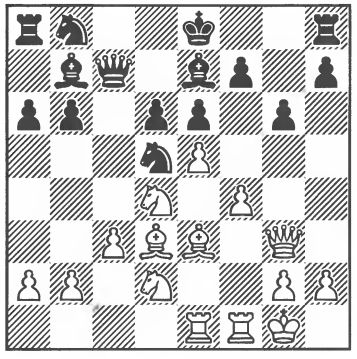
8.♘d2 ♕xc3 9.♖c1 ♕xd3 10.♖xc5 ♘c6 11.♕c1!, and the black queen is trapped. After 11...a5 12.♘b5 ♖b8 13.a4 ♘ge7 14.♖c3 ♘b4 15.♕d1, Black resigned (Kosteniuk-Smirin, Moscow 2006, Tal Memorial blitz).

8.♕g4 g6 9.f4 ♘f6 10.♕g3 b6 11.♘d2 ♗b7 12.0-0 ♗e7 13.♖ae1

The immediate 13.e5 ♘d5 14.♗f2 d6 15.♘e4, or 15.f5, with a small advantage, was worth considering.

13...d6 14.e5 ♘d5

14...♘h5 15.exd6 ♗xd6 16.♕h3 0-0 17.f5 exf5 18.♘xf5 would have been dangerous.



15.♗f2?!

Too slow – 15.♘e4 ♘xe3 16.♕xe3 d5 17.♘d6+ was better, with advantage.

15...dxe5 16.fxe5 ♘d7 17.♘c4

Stronger was 17.a3!? (preparing c3-c4) 17...b5 18.c4 bxc4 19.♘xc4 0-0 20.b4, when White has the better position.

17...0-0-0?!

The queenside is not the safest place for the king in this position. The black monarch would have been better off sheltering on the kingside, after 17...0-0.

18.b4

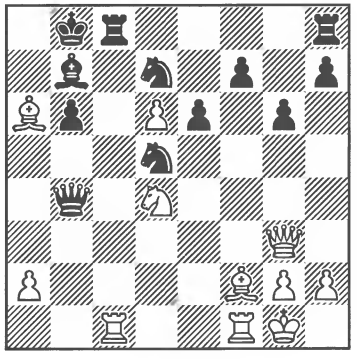
An immediate 18.♘d6+ ♗xd6 19.exd6 ♕b8 20.♘f3, with a small advantage to White, would also have been interesting.

18...♔b8 19.♘d6 ♗xd6

19...♘xe5 would not work because of 20.♘xb7 (but not 20.♘6b5 axb5 21.♘xb5 ♘xd3 22.♘xc7 ♘xc7 23.♖d1 ♗d6).

20.exd6 ♕xc3 21.♖c1 ♕xb4 22.♗xa6 ♖c8

Black loses after 22...♘c5 23.♖c4 ♕a5 24.d7+ ♔a8 25.♗xb7+ ♔xb7 26.♕d6 ♖xd7 (26...♔a6 27.♘b3 ♘xb3 28.axb3) 27.♕c6+ ♔a6 28.♘xe6! fxe6 29.♖xc5.



23.♗b5?!

The wrong solution to the problem of what to exchange. Keeping all the rooks on the board by 23.♖b1 ♕d2 24.♗b5 was stronger.

23...♖xc1 24.♖xc1 ♖c8 25.♖f1 ♘5f6

25...♖c3 doesn't work, owing to 26.♕h4 ♕xd6 27.♕d8+ ♗c8 28.♗g3 e5 (28...♖xg3 29.hxg3 ♘c7 30.♘c6+ ♔b7 31.a4) 29.♗xd7 ♕xd7 30.♗xe5+.

26.♕f4 ♔a8 27.a3 ♕b2?

27...♕c5 28.♗xd7 ♘xd7 29.♕xf7 ♕d5 30.♘f3 ♕xd6 was preferable, with a complex game.

28.♗xd7 ♘xd7 29.♕xf7 ♘c5?

The decisive error – Black could still have fought on after 29...♖c1 30.♕e8+ ♘b8 31.♕xe6.

30.d7 ♖d8 31.♕e8

31.♕f6 ♖xd7 32.♕h8+ ♔a7 33.♘c6+ would have won too.

31...♘d3 32.♕xd8+ ♔a7 33.♘c6+ ♗xc6 34.♕xb6+. Black resigned.

No. 31 Ruy López C92

A. Kosteniuk – E. Polovnikova

Kazan 2004

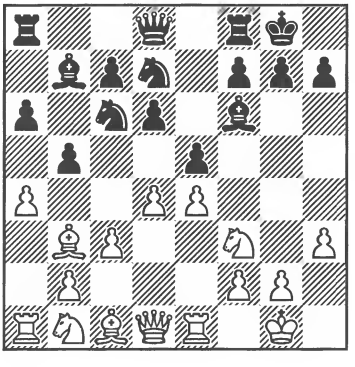
I first met Katya Polovnikova back in Lipetsk 1992. Since Katya is two

years older, she would usually win when we played each other in the junior tournaments. So our games always took on a very determined character.

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 a6 4.♗a4 ♘f6 5.0-0 ♗e7 6.♖e1 b5 7.♗b3 d6 8.c3 0-0 9.h3 ♘d7 10.d4 ♗f6 11.a4 ♗b7

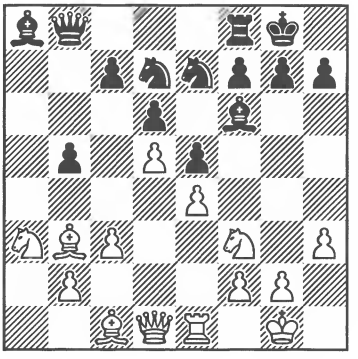
Everything new in today's chess is just what's been well and truly forgotten. This is why I especially recommend that the reader study the chess literature – and not just today's literature, which mostly boils down to copying opening variations off the computer screen. I mean the good old literature: analysis of the games from world championship matches, or the collected games of the Interzonals. The opening is also better studied as ideas, not as memorizing concrete move orders, but games in which similar ideas, pawn structures, and piece arrangements have already been played.

This currently rare variation, for instance, was known in the early '50s, when Boleslavsky used a cute tactical shot to win a pawn and later the game. In 2008, the 14-year-old Hou Yifan – my eventual opponent in the final match for the world championship – delivered the exact same tactical shot.



12.d5

12.axb5 axb5 13.♖xa8 ♗xa8 (13...♕xa8) 14.d5 ♘e7 15.♘a3 ♕b8:



16.♘xb5! (Hou Yifan-Granda Zúñiga, Mérida 2008) 16...c6 17.dxc6 ♘c5 18.♗c4 ♗xc6 19.♕xd6 ♘xe4 20.♕xb8 ♖xb8 21.♘a3, with ♘c2 to follow, and White won in 83 moves in Boleslavsky-Smyslov, Moscow 1950.

12...♘e7 13.♘a3

After 13.axb5 axb5 14.♖xa8, the game would transpose back to the above variation.

13...♕b8

Now, because of her unprotected rook at a1, White cannot exploit the weakness of the b5-pawn.

14.♗e3?!

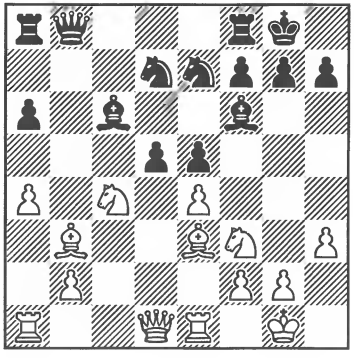
White should have started playing on the kingside, exploiting the fact that most of Black's pieces are at the opposite end of the board. For example, 14.♘h2 c6 15.♘g4 cxd5 16.exd5, or 14.axb5 axb5 15.♘h2.

14...c6 15.c4 bxc4 16.dxc6 ♗xc6

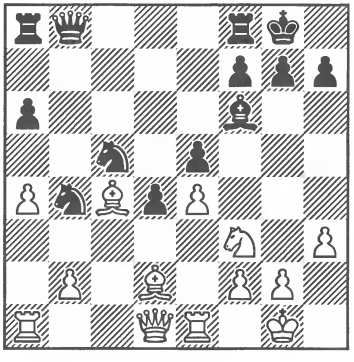
Black would achieve near-equality after 16...cxb3 17.cxb7 ♕xb7 18.♕xd6 ♖fd8 19.♖ac1 ♘f8 20.♕b6 ♕xe4 21.♕xb3.

17.♘xc4 d5

Black has executed her planned central break, and we may say that she has won the opening duel. But fortunately, there are two more duels in a chess game.



18.♘a5 d4 19.♘xc6 ♘xc6 20.♗d2 ♘b4 21.♗c4 ♘c5



22.♖a3!?

An interesting rook lift.

22...a5

In the variation after 22...♕b7, the rook lift turns out to be very useful: 23.♘h2 ♗e7 24.♖g3 ♘xe4 25.♕f3 ♘d6 26.♕xb7 ♘xb7 27.♘g4, and the black king is in danger.

23.♘h2 d3 24.♘g4 ♕d6 25.♗e3 ♘c2?

After 25...♘xe4 26. ♗xd3, the position would be about equal; but Black wanted to punish her opponent for her uncertain play in the opening. However, by weakening her own king, she allows the white pieces to develop a dangerous initiative.

26.♘xf6+ gxf6 27.♗xc5

I could also have played 27.♖c3 ♘xe3 28.♖xe3 ♖ab8 29.♗xd3 at once.

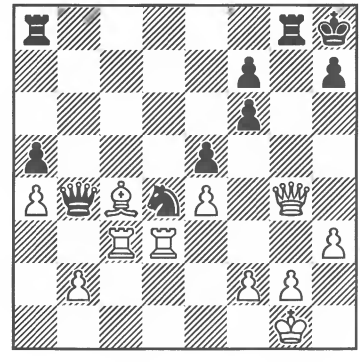
27...♕xc5 28.♖c3

White's rook at e1 is taboo, because of ♗xf7+.

28...♕b4 29.♕g4+ ♔h8 30.♖d1 ♘d4 31.♖dxd3

31.♕h4 ♘e2+ 32.♔h2 ♘xc3 33.♕xf6+ ♔g8 is a draw by perpetual check.

31...♖g8



32.♕d1?!

And here, I would have done better to play 32.♕h4 ♘e2+ 33.♔h2 ♘xc3 34.♕xf6+ ♖g7 35.♖xc3 ♖ag8 36.g3 ♕xb2 37.♖f3 ♕d4 38.♗d5, when Black can do nothing to stop White's plan of advancing the h-pawn.

32...♕xb2 33.♖g3

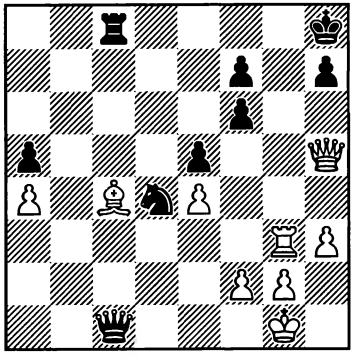
33.♖xd4? ♕xc3 loses for White.

33...♖ac8?

The natural move, but it's also the decisive mistake. She had to play 33... ♖ab8 34.♖xg8+ ♖xg8 35.♖e3 ♖c8

36.♕h5 ♕c1+ 37.♗f1 ♔g7 38.♔h2 ♖c3 39.♗d3 ♕d2, with equality.

34.♕h5 ♖xg3 35.♖xg3 ♕c1+



And here I almost overlooked a mate: 36.♗f1? ♕xf1+. But I pulled myself together and made the correct move:

36.♔h2 ♖f8 37.♕g4

The most accurate continuation was 37.♖g4! ♘e6 38.♖h4 ♘g5 39.♕h6 ♖g8 40.♕xf6+ ♖g7 41.♖g4 h5 42.♗xf7!, winning.

37...♕g5 38.♕xg5

In time pressure, I lost a bit of my advantage – 38.♕d7 ♕h6 39.♕e7 would have been stronger.

38...fxg5 39.♖xg5 f6 40.♖g3 h6

Black should have tried to activate her pieces by 40...♖c8 41.♗d5 ♖b8 42.h4 ♘e2 43.♖e3 ♖b2.

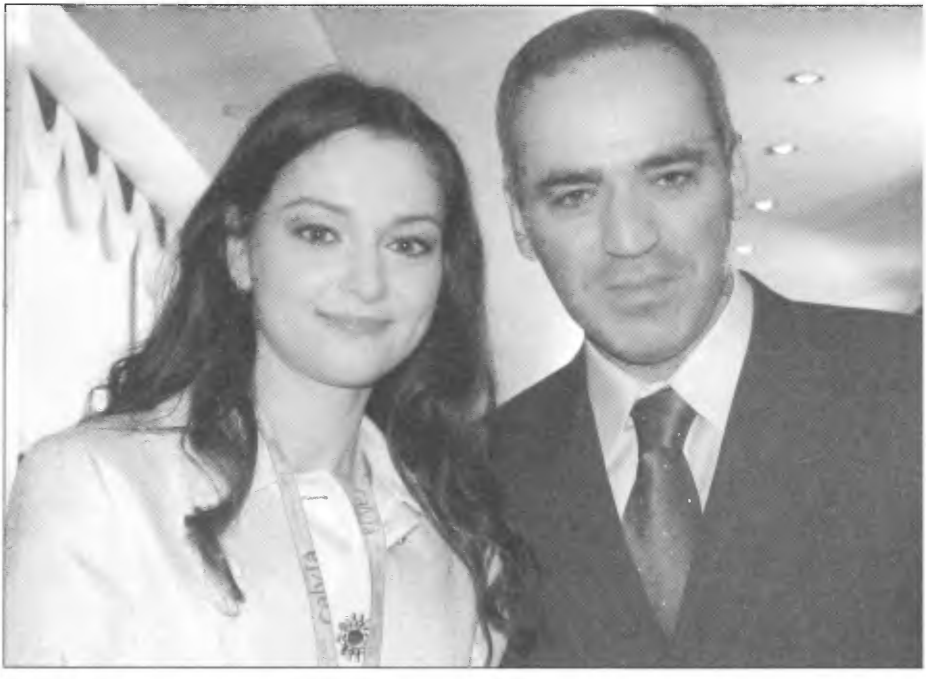
41.♗d5 f5 42.♖g6 fxe4 43.♗xe4 ♖xf2 44.♖xh6+ ♔g7 45.♖g6+ ♔f7 46.♖g4

46.♖a6 was good, too.

46...♘e2

Nor would 46...♖f4 47.♖xf4+ exf4 48.h4 ♔f6 49.♔h3 ♔e5 50.♗d3 (50.♗b1 f3 51.g4 ♔f4 52.h5) 50...f3 51.g3

Closing ceremony, 2004 Russian Superfinal. Left to right: Alexander Zhukov, President of the Russian Chess Federation; Tatiana Kosintseva; Mintimer Shaimiev, President of the Republic of Tatarstan; Alexandra Kosteniuk; Nadezhda Kosintseva



Two champions: with Garry Kasparov

♘b3 52.h5 have been enough to save Black.

After this, I brought the game home.

47.h4 ♖f6 48.h5 ♘f4 49.♖g5 ♔e6 50.g4 ♘e2 51.♗f5+ ♔f7 52.♔g2 ♘f4+ 53.♔g3 (or 53.♔f3 ♖c6 54.♗h7) **53...♖c6 54.♗g6+ ♔f6**

54...♔e6 55.♖f5 ♖c3+ 56.♔h4 ♖h3+ 57.♔g5 and White is winning.

55.♖f5+ ♔e6 56.♗f7+. Black resigned.

Round 5 saw the game that decided the tournament, when I played Tatiana Kosintseva. Playing White, I tried too hard to attack at some point, and ended up losing. Despite a good finish, and a final score of 8 out of 11, I finished only in second place, half a point behind Tatiana. But I had met my minimum goal: I had earned a place on the Russian team. Kazan has become for me the "silver city": twice before this, in 1993 and 1998, I had played in the capital city of Tatarstan, and both times I had taken second place with 8 points (although in those tournaments, it was over 9 rounds).

In the summer of 2004, I played in Biel again, and gave a simultaneous exhibition at the Savoy luxury hotel, located right in the center of Zurich. Afterwards, I flew to Miami for a little rest and relaxation, to rebuild my strength after a hot summer of chess competition.

In September, I played in the Lausanne Young Masters tournament; and in October, I competed in the 36th World Chess Olympiad in Calvià.

The 2004 Calvià Olympiad was my second as a member of the Russian Women's Team; but it was the first in which

I competed as team leader. On second board, we had Ekaterina Kovalevskaya; on third, Tatiana Kosintseva, with Nadezhda Kosintseva as reserve. Playing first board in team events is a double responsibility; and the opposition is often far stronger than on the other boards. Today, practically every country can boast at least one strong woman player. In Calvià, the first-board roster was positively star-studded: I played against three former world champions – Maia Chiburdanidze, Zsuzsa Polgar, and Xie Jun – as well as the then-World Champion, Antoaneta Stefanova. Now that I am myself the World Champion, I can understand how difficult it was for Antoaneta to play, for every win over a world champion is special, and almost every opponent that you play is putting her full effort into it. In such famous company, I did well to score 7 out of 11, with a performance rating of 2539. At the FIDE Congress, held during the Calvià Olympiad, there was one more significant event: I was officially awarded the men's International Grandmaster title.

No. 32 Sicilian Defense B63

A. Stefanova – A. Kosteniuk

Calvià 2004

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 d6 6.♗g5 e6 7.♕d2 ♕b6

This game was from the seventh-round match between Russia and Bulgaria. We had Black on Boards 1 and 3: Stefanova against me, and Maria Velcheva against Nadia Kosintseva. After making my opening moves, I glanced over at the neighboring boards, and saw to my amazement that Nadia and I had the exact same position!

8.0-0-0 ♗e7

Our opponents also soon saw that we were playing the same variation in both games; and when this position came up on our board, Antoaneta played the same move Velcheva had just played.

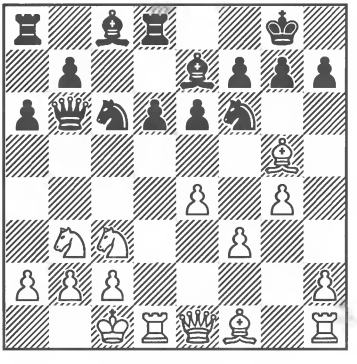
9.♘b3 0-0 10.f3 a6

I played this without thinking, as I had planned to play this line before I sat down at the board. But Nadia played a different line, and now our games diverged: 10... ♖d8 11.g4 d5 12.exd5 ♘xd5 13.♗xe7 ♘dxe7 14.♗d3 e5 15.♕g5 ♗e6; and after a tense struggle, that game ended in a draw on move 57.

11.g4

11.♗xf6 ♗xf6 12.♕xd6 ♖d8 13.♕c5 ♖xd1+ 14.♔xd1 ♕c7 would give Black the initiative. Another popular move in this position is 11.h4, which occurred, for example, in a game Ganguly-Svidler, Bled 2002.

11...♖d8 12.♕e1?!



Antoaneta had started playing 1.e4 quite recently (previously, she had always started her games with 1.d4), so she was still not very familiar with these positions. The queen move here is a loss of tempo. The usual move for White is 12.♗e3.

12...♕c7 13.h4 b5 14.♗e3 ♘d7 15.f4?! ♗b7

Another line worth considering was 15...♘b6 16.♕f2 ♖b8, followed by ...b5-b4.

16.g5 ♖ac8 17.♖h2

On 17.♔b1, Black has the unpleasant 17...b4 18.♘a4 ♘a5 19.♗d3 d5, with the threat of ...♗c6 and ...♘c4; and if 20.♘b6?, then 20...dxe4! 21.♘xc8 ♖xc8 wins for Black.

17...♘c5 18.h5?

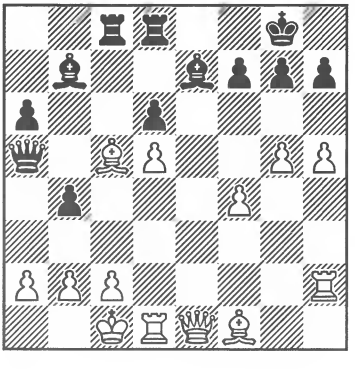
White would have done better to play 18.♘xc5 dxc5, but Black would still have a good position.

18...b4 19.♘d5 exd5 20.exd5 ♘a5?

Today, in the comfort of my home, I completely fail to understand why I needed to return my extra piece. After 20...♘b8 21.h6 g6 22.♕xb4 ♘bd7 23.♕d4 ♗f8 24.♗h3 ♖e8, Black would have had a quiet, secure position – and an extra knight.

21.♘xa5 ♕xa5 22.♗xc5

When I gave back the piece, I decided that with two good continuations to choose from, I would only need to decide which one to play. I made my next move in the belief that the positions after this move would be much more interesting and complex than the ones arising after 22...♕xc5.



22...♖e8?

Now White takes over the initiative. 22...♖xc5? 23.♕xe7 ♗xd5 24.h6 was not good either, so 22...♕xc5 23.♕xe7 ♗xd5 was to be preferred. Black has the advantage, and White must play very accurately. For example:

1) 24.♗xa6? ♖e8 25.♕d7 ♖a8 26.♕b5 (26.♖e2 ♖xe2 27.♗xe2 b3! loses for White) 26...♕e3+ 27.♖hd2 ♗f3, with advantage to Black;

2) 24.g6 ♖e8 25.♕d7 ♗xa2 26.gxh7+ ♔h8 27.♖hd2 (on 27.♕xd6?, it's mate in 8: 27...♕e3+ 28.♖dd2 ♖xc2+ 29.♔xc2 b3+ 30.♔c1 ♕e1+ 31.♖d1 ♖c8+ 32.♕c6 ♖xc6+ 33.♗c4 ♖xc4+ 34.♖c2 ♖xc2#, while on 27.♗xa6?, it's mate in 5: 27...♕e3+ 28.♖hd2 ♖xc2+ 29.♔xc2 b3+ 30.♔c1 ♕c5+ 31.♖c2 ♕xc2#, or 28.♖dd2 ♖xc2+ 29.♔xc2 ♗b3+ 30.♔c1 ♕e1+ 31.♖d1 ♕xd1#) 27...♗e6 28.♕xd6 ♕a5 29.♕xa6 ♕xh5, and Black's position is to be preferred.

23.♗d4!

23.♕xb4 ♖xc5 (23...♕xa2 24.♕a3) 24.♕xb7 ♕xa2 25.♕xa6 ♖a5 leads to a roughly even position.

23...♕xa2 24.♕xb4

Here I saw that after

24...♗xd5

White could simply play 25.♕a3, with a better ending, where I would have to fight for the draw.

25.♖h3?

25.♕a3 ♕xa3 26.bxa3 ♗f3 27.♖d3 ♗e4 28.♖e3 was preferable, with a small advantage.

25...♗e4 26.♗d3?

And now Black has a forced win. During the game, I thought that after 26.♖c3, White would still have a good position, but now it's not so clear: 26...a5 27.♕a3 (or 27.♕b3 ♕xb3 28.cxb3 d5

A major encounter with Antoaneta Stefanova

and Black holds the initiative) 27...♕xa3 28.bxa3 ♖xc3 29.♗xc3 d5, with a slightly better endgame for Black.

26...d5 27.♕b7

27.♕b6 wouldn't save White either, due to 27...♗xd3 28.♖hxd3 (28.♖dxd3 ♕a1+ 29.♔d2 ♗b4+ 30.c3 ♕xb2+ 31.♔d1 ♖e2 32.♕d8+ ♖xd8 33.cxb4 ♕c2#) 28...♗xg5! 29.fxg5 (29.♗e3 ♗xf4!) 29...♖e2.

27...♕a1+ 28.♔d2 ♕a4 29.c3 ♗xd3 30.♖xd3 ♖b8 31.♕xd5 ♗xg5! 32.b4 ♗xf4+ 33.♗e3 ♗xe3+ 34.♖xe3 ♖bd8

White resigned.

I had my first training sessions with Yuri Razuvaev after the Calvià Olympiad. We dedicated those sessions to the Ruy López – the opening which, four years later, would help me to become World Champion. In these meetings, Yuri Sergeyevich recommended that I try to solve chess studies blindfold. Since then, you will rarely find me without a study collection in hand. Since 2004, I have solved more than a thousand studies, and have become a great fan of chess composition. I particularly like the

Discussing the latest game with Yuri Razuvaev

miniatures – treasures created on the board with a minimal number of pieces. And also, once I started the practice of regular study-solving, all those breaks, waiting periods, flights and train trips no longer made me nervous: all I had to do was to open up my book and spend a few hours immersed in problem-solving.

The best moments of the 2004 Calvià Olympiad – Team Russia at a disco and the awards ceremony. Left to right: Alexandra Kosteniuk, Tatiana Kosintseva, Nadezhda Kosintseva, Ekaterina Kovalevskaya, and coach Yuri Yakovich

Chapter 7
Russian Gold

In early 2005, I competed in two strong men's tournaments. In January, I went to Wijk aan Zee for the fourth time. Hardly anything ever changes in this little Dutch town. Once again, the familiar streets, the beach, the north wind, and the scent of pea soup in the tournament hall. This soup is traditionally offered to the participants and guests of the festival. During the Second World War, the tournament was still held, even if there was nothing to feed the players. So the organizers began to cook simple pea soups, which they have continued doing to this day.

That year, the average rating of the "B" tournament was 2564, or FIDE Category XIII. The only women players were Antoaneta Stefanova and me. The tournament began very well for me: in the first round, I managed to beat grandmaster Alexander Onischuk in a not entirely error-free game.

No. 33 Ruy López C65
A. Kosteniuk – A. Onischuk
Wijk aan Zee 2005

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♘f6 4.0-0 ♗c5 5.c3 0-0 6.d4 ♗b6 7.♗g5 h6 8.♗h4 d6

The quiet before the storm at Wijk aan Zee

Not the most popular line of the Ruy López for Black. It's usually not as dangerous for White to play an unfamiliar position in the opening as it is for Black, since the price of a move is not so high for him. White's errors usually lead only to a leveling out of the position, whereas a mistake by Black could cost him dearly.

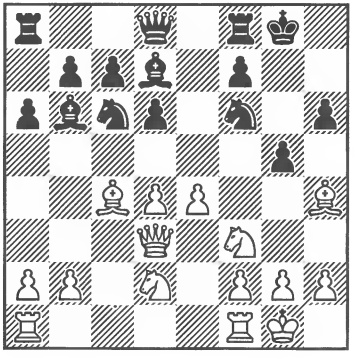
9.♕d3 ♗d7

Another possible continuation is 9... ♕e7 10.♘bd2 ♘b8, but after moves like this Black's position does not inspire confidence.

10.♘bd2 a6 11.♗c4 exd4

Black's attempt to untangle himself by 11...g5 would allow White to develop a strong attack after 12.♘xg5 hxg5 13.♗xg5. For example: 13...♔g7 (White's threats are also very dangerous after 13... exd4 14.f4 dxc3+ 15.♔h1 cxd2 16.e5) 14.f4 exd4 15.e5 dxe5 16.♕g3 ♖g8 (16... dxc3+ 17.♔h1 ♖g8 [17...♘h5 18.♗f6+! mates soon] 18.fxe5 ♘h5 19.♕h4, and White wins) 17.fxe5 ♔f8 18.exf6 ♔e8 19.♖ae1+ ♗e6 20.♗xe6 fxe6 21.f7+, and Black resigned in Kulaots-Khudyakov, Alushta 2003.

12.cxd4 g5?!

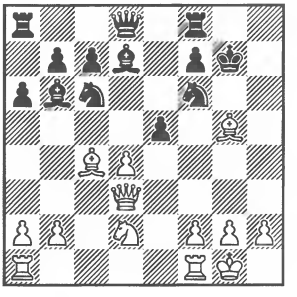


Both Alexander and I expended a good deal of time to reach this position. Nevertheless, as so often happens, it was already known; later in 2005, analysis appeared in the chess literature demonstrating that 13.♘xg5! wins for White. But I chose a different way to develop an attack.

13.e5?

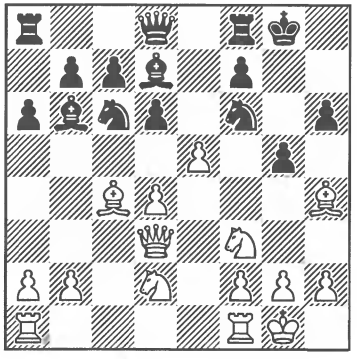
13.♗g3 was played in Svidler-Leko, Linares 1999, where White ultimately won.

And here's how events might have unfolded after the piece sacrifice: 13.♘xg5! hxg5 14.♗xg5 ♔g7! (14... ♘xd4 loses in view of 15.♕g3 ♔g7 16.♗h4+ ♔h7 17.e5 dxe5 18.♕xe5) 15.e5! dxe5:



16.♖ae1! (16.♘e4 ♗f5! 17.dxe5 ♘xe4! 18.♗xd8 ♖axd8 19.♕f3 ♗g6 favors Black) 16...♗xd4 (White wins after either 16...♘xd4 17.♘e4 ♗f5 18.♕g3 ♗xe4 19.♗xf6+ ♔xf6 20.♖xe4 ♕d6 21.♕h4+ ♔f5 22.♖fe1 ♘c6 23.♗b3! ♕d2 24.♕h5+ ♔f6 25.♕f3+ ♔e7 26.♖xe5+; or 16...exd4 17.♘e4 ♗f5 18.♕g3 ♘xe4 [or 18...♗xe4 19.♗xf6+ ♔xf6 20.♖xe4 ♕d6 21.h4 with a strong attack] 19.♖xe4 ♗xe4 20.♗xd8+) 17.♘e4 ♗f5 18.♕f3 ♗xe4 19.♖xe4 ♘xe4 20.♗xd8 ♖axd8 21.♕g4+ ♔h6 22.♕xe4 ♖d6 23.♖d1 ♔g7 24.♖d3 ♖g6 25.♖f3 b5 26.♗d3 f5 27.♖xf5 ♖xf5 28.♕xf5 ♖f6 29.♕d7+ ♔f8 30.♔h1

♘e7 31.♕xc7 ♔f7 32.g4 ♖xf2 33.g5, and Black resigned, Knebel-Daus, corr. 2005.



13...gxh4?

Black should have played 13...d5! 14.♘xg5 (14.♗b3 gxh4 15.exf6 ♕xf6 16.♗xd5 ♖ad8 17.♘e4 ♕g7 18.♘xh4 ♘b4 19.♕b3 ♘xd5 20.♕xd5 ♗c6 with advantage to Black) 14...dxc4 15.♘xc4 hxg5 16.♗xg5 ♗c8 (on 16...♗g4 17.♗xf6 ♕xd4 18.♕g3 ♕e4 19.♕h4 or 16...♗e6 17.♘d6 ♘b4 18.♕d2, White wins; while 16...♘b4 17.♕a3 [17.♕b3 ♗e6 18.♖fd1 ♗xc4 19.♕xb4 ♘d5 20.♕xc4 ♕xg5 21.♕xd5] 17...♘c2 18.♕d3 ♘b4 leads to an equal position) 17.♘xb6 cxb6 18.♖fd1 ♘xe5 19.dxe5 ♕xd3 20.♖xd3 ♘e4, and now it's White who must think about how to make a draw.

14.♕g6+ ♔h8 15.♕xh6+ ♘h7 16.♘e4

16.♗d3!? was worth considering, for example: 16...f5 17.exf6 ♖f7 18.♘e4! ♗f5 19.♘fg5 ♖xf6 20.♘xf6 ♕xf6 21.♕xf6+ ♘xf6 22.♗xf5, when White's advantage is obvious.

16...f5

After 16...♖g8, Black would still have to lose material: 17.♘f6 ♗f5 18.♘xh4 ♗c2 19.♖ac1.

17.♘fg5 ♕e7 18.♘f6 ♕g7 19.♕xh7+ ♕xh7 20.♘gxh7 ♖fd8 21.♘g5 dxe5 22.♘f7+ ♔g7 23.dxe5 ♘xe5 24.♘h5+ ♔g6 25.♘xe5+

Stronger still would have been 25.♘f4+ ♔f6 26.♘xd8, and on either recapture White plays ♘d5 and ♘xb6, trading off one of Black's bishops.

25...♔xh5 26.♗e2+ ♔g5 27.♘f7+ ♔f6 28.♘xd8 ♖xd8 29.♖ad1 ♖e8 30.♗f3

I don't know why I rejected 30.♗xa6; but eliminating one pair of bishops is of course good for White. For we know that the side trying to realize extra material must strive to trade pieces; while the side trying to defend should try to trade pawns.

30...♗c8 31.♖fe1 ♖g8 32.♗d5 ♖h8 33.♗b3 ♗c5 34.♖d3

Perhaps White's best plan was to double rooks on the e-file and try to get to the eighth rank, since White's main idea in this position is to trade off the rooks. Of course, my task is made more difficult by Black's possession of the two bishops, which create a defensive barrier.

34...♗d6 35.♗d5 b6 36.g3 ♗d7 37.♖f3

37.♖d4!? was interesting, with the idea of trading rooks after 37...hxg3 38.hxg3 ♗e5 39.♖h4 ♖xh4 40.gxh4, and continuing with 40...♗xb2 41.h5 ♔g5 42.♖e7 ♗b5 43.♖xc7 ♔xh5 44.♗c6 ♗d3 45.a4 ♔g5 46.♖b7 b5 47.axb5 axb5 48.♗xb5 ♗e4, in order to trade bishops as well after 49.♗c6!.

37...♖h5 38.♖e4 hxg3 39.hxg3 f4 40.♖fxf4+

My technique in the conversion stage had not been too good: here, I would rather give up the exchange than see the black rook activated after 40.♗b7 ♖c5.

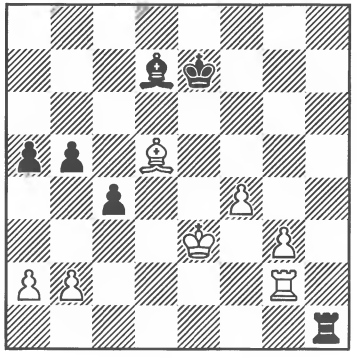
To me, it seemed as though the ending, with my two connected passed pawns, should be an easy win.

40...♗xf4 41.♖xf4+ ♔e7 42.♖d4 c5 43.♖d2 b5 44. f4

44.f3!? deserved consideration, the idea being not to allow Black's pieces entry into White's camp. For example: 44...c4 45.g4 ♖g5 (45...♖h8 46.♔g2 ♖d8 47.♗e4 ♖g8 48.♔g3 a5 49.♔f4 ♖f8+ 50.♔e5 ♖g8 51.♗f5) 46.♔f2 a5 47.♔g3 ♖g6 48.♔f4 ♖f6+ (48...♖h6 49.g5 ♖h1 50.♖g2, and in this position, my pawns have advanced further than they did in the game) 49.♔e5: White's pieces are centralized, and soon she should be able to convert her extra pawn.

44...c4 45.♔f2 a5 46.♔e3 ♖h3 47.♖g2 ♖h1

By the second time control, the position had grown sharper, and I wanted to play something safe.



48.a4

After 48.g4!? I would most likely have won, for example: 48...♖d1 49.♗b7 ♖a1 50.g5 ♖xa2 51.g6 c3 52.g7 ♗e6 53.♖g6 ♗g8 54.bxc3 b4 55.cxb4 axb4 56.f5.

48...b4 49.♗xc4 ♗xa4 50.g4 ♗c6 51.♖g3

Despite the well-known rule that the rook is generally best placed behind the passed pawn, in this position it would be better to take it off the g-file and leave it on the second rank, where it not only helps its pawns to advance, but also prevents the enemy pawns from advancing. For example, 51.♖e2 ♔f8 52.f5 a4 53.f6 a3 54.bxa3 bxa3 55.♔f4 ♗e8 56.♖d2 ♖c1 57.♗a2 ♖f1+ 58.♔g5 ♖h1 59.♖d3, and White should win.

51...♖e1+ 52.♔d2 ♖b1 53.b3 a4 54.♖e3+

Clearly, White has misplayed this, and will now have to start the cashing-in process all over again. I haven't set myself to establishing and documenting an accurate assessment of this position, but of course Black has good chances to draw here. For example: 54.bxa4 ♗xa4 55.g5 b3 56.g6 ♖d1+ 57.♔c3 ♖c1+ 58.♔b2 ♖xc4 59.g7 ♖c2+ 60.♔b1 ♖c8, 61.g8♕ ♖xg8 62.♖xg8, and according to the Nalimov tablebase, Black can draw, but only if he plays 62...♗c6.

54...♔f8 55.bxa4 ♗xa4 56.♗d3?!

In the second time scramble, I didn't have time to see that the most important thing here is activating the rook. I should have looked at 56.♖e6!? b3 57.♖f6+ ♔e7 (57...♔g7 58.♖f7+ ♔h8 59.♖f8+ ♔g7 60.♖g8+, and White's pawns must be faster) 58.♖b6 b2 59.♗e2 ♗d7 60.f5, and after ♔c3, White wins the b2-pawn and the game.

56...♖b2+ 57.♔c1 ♖g2?

Black would have held out longer with 57...♖b3.

58.g5 ♗e8 59.♖e6!

An important move. Finally, I understood that the most important thing was to activate my rook. And despite having only seconds to reach

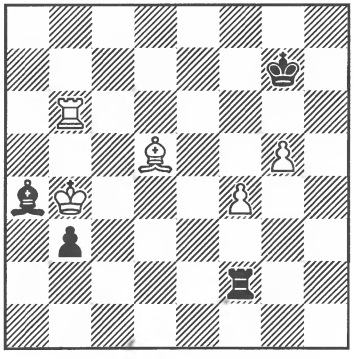
the time control, I managed to play the strongest move.

59...b3 60.♖b6 ♖g4 61.♖f6+ ♔g7 62.♗c4 ♗a4 63.♗d5 ♖g3 64.♔b2 ♖e3 65.♖b6 ♖e2+ 66.♔a3

And here, 66.♔c3!? would have been interesting.

66...♖a2+ 67.♔b4 ♖f2

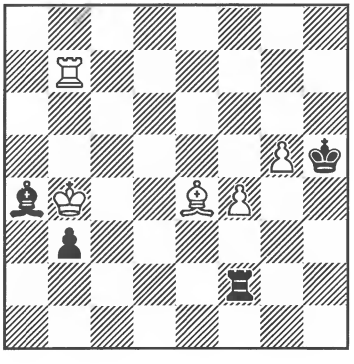
Once again I had attained a winning position; but by the sixth hour of play, finding the exact continuation was not the easiest of tasks.



68.♖b7+ ♔g6

All other king retreats lose, for example: 68...♔h8 69.g6; or 68...♔f8 69.♔xa4 ♖xf4+ 70.♔xb3 ♖f5 71.♖b8+ ♔e7 72.g6.

69.♗e4+ ♔h5



70.♖f7?

I could have put an end to the battle by 70.g6!! ♖xf4 71.♖h7+ ♔g5 72.g7 ♖xe4+ 73.♔a3 ♖e8 74.♖h8!, but the last move of this line fell just outside the bounds of my calculation.

70...♗e8 71.♖f8 b2 72.♔c3 ♗g6 73.♖h8+ ♔g4 74.♗xg6 ♖xf4 75.♔xb2 ♔xg5

And so, according to all the manuals and tablebases, this position is a draw; however, there have been many games in which the stronger side was able to win. One must also keep in mind that, in Wijk aan Zee, the games are played using the classical seven-hour time control, without an increment *(time added for each move played, usually 30 seconds – ed.)*. This makes the defense more difficult. And White also has just 50 moves to work with – Black could claim a draw on move 125.

76.♗d3 ♔f6 77.♖e8 ♔f7

I have had two games in my practice with this material balance. Both times I had the extra material, and both times I succeeded in winning. Although this is a theoretically drawn position, it's not a simple matter to hold it over the board. I have tried to play it for the defending side against the computer that hosts the six-pieces tablebase. At first, I was unable to last longer than thirty moves. If the defender's king is forced to the edge of the board, it's a very difficult defense indeed. So the first thing the attacking side will try to do is to force the opposing king back.

With the king in the center, it's easier to defend if you know the basic ideas – Cochrane's position and the seventh-rank defense. I won't get into the details here: without a doubt, it's an interesting endgame. Those who wish to know how to make the draw, and how White

wins from the famous Philidor position, should consult the major endgame manuals, such as Mark Dvoretsky's fundamental work.

78.♖e3 ♔f6 79.♔c3 ♖h4 80.♗c4 ♔f5 81.♔b4 ♔f4 82.♖e7 ♖h5 83.♔c3 ♖e5 84.♖f7+ ♖f5 85.♖e7 ♖e5 86.♖h7 ♖e3+ 78.♖e3 ♔f6 79.♔c3 ♖h4 80.♗c4 ♔f5 81.♔b4 ♔f4 82.♖e7 ♖h5 83.♔c3 ♖e5 84.♖f7+ ♖f5 85.♖e7 ♖e5 86.♖h7 ♖e3+

It's very hard to play this position without guideposts, so it's important to memorize at least one of the defensive fortresses. After 93...♖d2, Black could try to set up a defensive barrier on the second rank.

94.♖h3+ ♔f2 95.♗c4 ♖a8 96.♔d4 ♖a4 97.♖c3 ♖a7 98.♔e4 ♖h7 99.♖f3+

I finally manage to drive Black's king closer to the edge of the board; and although the position remains drawn, Black must now pay attention or he will lose.

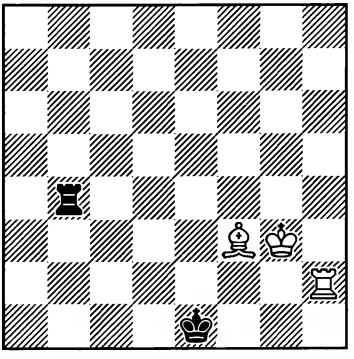
99...♔g2 100.♗d5 ♖h4+ 101.♔e5

Of course not 101.♔e3?, because of 101...♖h3, exchanging the rooks.

101...♔g1 102.♗e4 ♖h2 103.♖f4 ♖d2 104.♔f5 ♖f2 105.♗f3 ♖b2 106. ♖h4 ♖b8 107.♔f4 ♔f2 108.♖h2+ ♔e1 109.♗e4

Now there are only two moves that keep the position drawn: the one played in the game, and 109...♔d1.

109...♖b3 110.♗f3 ♖b4+ 111.♔g3



In good company: at the Aeroflot Open with Viktor Korchnoi and Boris Spassky, Moscow, February 2005

111...♖d4?

The only move to hold the position was 111...♖b3!, with the idea 112.♖e2+ ♔f1 113.♖d2 ♖e3.

112.♖e2+ ♔f1 113.♖e3 ♖d2 114. ♖a3. Black resigned.

I placed tenth at Wijk aan Zee, while Sergey Karjakin won the "B" tournament with 9½ points out of 13. After this victory, beginning in 2006 Sergey has always played in the "A" Super-tournament. In 2009, he managed to win that group.

Immediately after Wijk aan Zee, I competed in the Aeroflot Open. Then, once again, I flew off to Miami, to prepare myself for the Russian Championship, which was to take place in Samara in May.

On March 23, 2005, I began to keep a diary once again, this time electronically. Here's my first entry at LiveJournal (www.livejournal.com):

You're always doing something for the first time. You go through life learning new things, whether it's the taste of mother's milk or the scent of the spring breeze. Sometimes you feel bad, and want to cry; other times, the sun comes out and chases your troubles away. You are amazed by everything that surrounds you, and try not to get too angry at this world full of evil and injustice. You try to keep in your heart a piece of your childhood and love for people, the world, your beloved, yourself, and what makes you, you. I hope this journal will help me find the answers to these vexing questions, and keep within its pages the happiest moments of my life....

In April 2005 I traveled to Colombia at the invitation of the Colombian company JGB, makers of the vitamin drink Tarrito Rojo. In the week that I spent in this Latin American country, I gave countless interviews, along with a few simultaneous exhibitions. The largest of these was put together in one of Bogotá's major commercial centers. I had not seen such interest in a chess event in a long time. The whole five hours that the simul lasted, there was a huge crowd watching the games.

There's another interesting story, which I only heard about four years later. During my visit to Colombia, a great number of stories about me were printed. At the same time, somewhere in the jungles of Colombia, three Americans were kidnapped; one of them, Mark Gonsalves, happened to spot one of these stories. Encouraged by what he had read, he carved himself a chess set, which helped him to pass the time until his release (and he and his fellow captives spent 1967 days imprisoned). In 2009, Mark published a book, *Out of Captivity*, where Mark talks about this incident. I am happy that chess helped Mark through a tough time in his life.

The Russian Superfinal for Women in Samara in May 2005 attracted an impressive list of entries. Along with those who had competed in 2004 in Kazan, there were some new faces: Natalia Pogonina, Valentina Gunina, Ekaterina Korbut, and Yulia Kochetkova, who had made it through a difficult qualifying process, as well as Yulia Yakovich, the local wild-card entry. Scoring 9 points out of 11 (+7 =4 -0) and a 2691 performance rating, I took my first national championship gold medal. The tournament was very difficult: it took all my strength to become Russian Champion.

Simultaneous exhibition in Bogotá, Colombia, April 2005

With youthful chess fans in Colombia

No. 34 Sicilian Defense B76

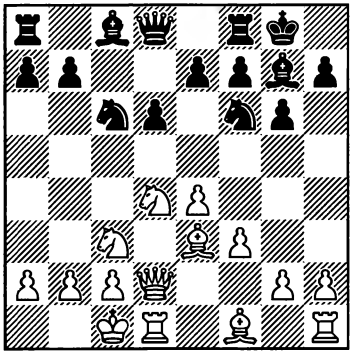
A. Kosteniuk – N. Pogonina

Samara 2005

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 g6

In Samara, Natalia never once abandoned her beloved Dragon: it appeared in all five games where she had Black.

6.♗e3 ♗g7 7.f3 0-0 8.♕d2 ♘c6 9.0-0-0



9...♘xd4

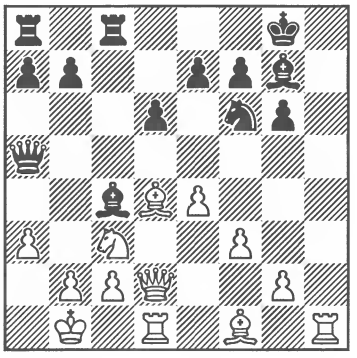
The most principled move in this position is 9...d5. This was, in fact, the continuation I spent the most time on in preparation for this game, since I was sure my opponent would not try the risky 9...♘xd4.

10.♗xd4 ♗e6 11.♔b1 ♕c7 12.h4 ♖fc8 13.h5 ♕a5

13...♘xh5? loses by force after 14.♗xg7 ♔xg7 15.g4 ♘f6 16.♕h6+ ♔g8 17.e5! dxe5 18.g5 ♘h5 19.♗d3 (19.♖xh5 gxh5 20.♗d3 e4 21.♘xe4 transposes to the main line) 19...e4 20.♖xh5 gxh5 21.♘xe4 ♕f4 22.♘f6+ exf6 23.♗xh7+ ♔h8 24.♗f5+ ♔g8 25.♕h7+ ♔f8 26.♕h8+, and Black resigned in Evans-Zuckerman, New York 1967.

14.hxg6 hxg6 15.a3 ♗c4

15...♖ab8 is more often played in this position. This was the move Natalia used against Tatiana Kosintseva, but that game also ended in a pretty victory for White.



16.g4!?

A novelty, thought up at the board. In every game before this one, White had played 16.♖h3.

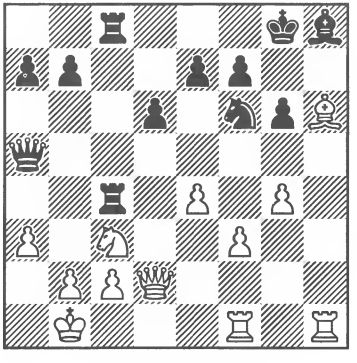
16...♗xf1

Black's attack comes too late after 16...b5 17.g5 ♘h5 18.♗xg7 ♔xg7 19.♗h3 ♖c7 20.♕d4+ ♔g8 21.♗g4.

17.♖dxf1 ♖c4 18.♗e3

In this kind of position, ♗d4-e3-h6-f8! frequently turns out fatally for Black.

18...♖ac8 19.♗h6 ♗h8



20.♘d5

Playing the Dragon requires you to stay vigilant, since one incautious move could have nasty consequences. For instance, 20.♕h2? (with the idea of 20...♕a6 21.♗f8) would be bad due to 20...♖xc3! 21.♗d2 ♗g7 22.♗xc3 ♖xc3 23.bxc3 ♕xa3, when Black's two minor pieces are much stronger than White's two rooks.

Black is also better after 20.♗f8 ♘h5 (20...♘h7? loses: 21.♖xh7 ♗xc3 22.♕h6) 21.gxh5 ♗xc3 22.bxc3 ♖xc3 23.hxg6 ♕b5+ 24.♔c1 ♖xc2+ 25.♕xc2 ♖xc2+ 26.♔xc2 ♕e2+.

20...♕d8 21.♘e3

21.♗g5!? ♗g7 (Black gets mated after 21...♘xd5?: 22.♖xh8+ ♔xh8 23.♕h2+ ♔g8 24.♖h1 ♘c3+ 25.♔a1 f6 26.♕h7+ ♔f8 27.♕xg6 e5 28.♖h8+ ♔e7 29.♖h7+ ♔f8 30.♗h6#) 22.♗xf6 exf6 23.c3 was worth considering: White doubles up on the h-file and then – in Fischer's words – comes "sac, sac and mate!"

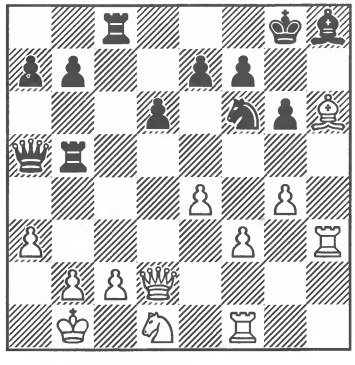
21...♖4c5 22.♖h3

At first, I planned to continue 22.♕h2; but then I saw that if I set up all three of my major pieces on the h-file, with the rook in front, the mate would be practically impossible to stop. On 22.♕h2 ♕b6 23.♗f8? ♖h5! 24.gxh5 ♘g4, on the other hand, it's Black who wins.

22...♖b5 (22...♕b6 would be met by 23.c4) **23.♘d1**

In contrast to most positions, here the d1 square is an excellent place for White's knight, because from here, it provides a secure defense for the white king.

23...♕a5



24.♕d3!

I spent a lot of time calculating variations here. White wants to continue with ♗d2 and ♖fh1. Once everything is defended on the queenside, I can go over to a direct attack on the opposite side of the board.

After 24.♕h2 ♕xa3 25.♗c1 ♗g7 26.♖h1 ♔f8 27.♖h8+ ♘g8, I couldn't find anything concrete for White, while Black would be preparing to attack my king. So I tried to think of something else, and was very happy to find the move ♕d3.

24...♕a6?!

24...♘d7 was stronger, although here too, White has the advantage after 25.♗e3 ♘e5 26.♗d4 ♗g7 27.♖fh1.

25.♖fh1 ♘d7 26.♗c1

Perhaps 26.♗g5!? ♗g7 27.♗xe7 was strongest here; but that would grant Black definite counterchances, which I didn't want to allow. But let's continue the analysis: 27...♕b6 (27...♘c5 28.♕xd6 ♕xd6 29.♗xd6 ♘e6; 27...♘e5 28.♕xd6 ♕xd6 29.♗xd6 ♘c4 30.♗b4 a5 31.♗c3) 28.c3 ♖xc3 29.♕xc3! ♗xc3 30.♘xc3 and White wins.

26...♗g7 27.♕d2 ♕a4?

The decisive error. On the other hand, even 27...♖bc5 28.♕h2 f6 29.♘e3 would still leave White with an overwhelming advantage.

28.♕h2 ♕d4 29.♖h8+! ♗xh8 30.♕h7+. Black resigned.

No. 35 Sicilian Defense B51

T. Kosintseva – A. Kosteniuk

Samara 2005

As often happens, my game with Tatiana was decisive. Even before our game it was clear that the winner of this encounter would have the better chance of becoming Russian Champion. The game was played in Round 9, when Tatiana was leading me by a half-point.

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 d6 4.0-0 ♗d7 5.♖e1 ♘f6 6.c3 a6 7.♗f1 ♗g4 8.d4

Tatiana had already played this line in the 2003 European Championship against Alisa Galliamova. Black chose 8...♗xf3?!, and White won confidently in 21 moves.

8...cxd4 9.cxd4 d5 10.e5 ♘g8!?

This looks a bit daring, but Black wants to play ...e7-e6 and reposition the knight to f5, thereby arriving at a favorable version of a French with the bishop at g4 instead of c8.

11.♗e3

Some years later, White found a dangerous plan against this rather daring knight maneuver: 11.e6!? ♗xe6 12.♖xe6!? fxe6 13.♕b3, with a dangerous initiative. For example: 13...♘a5 (13...g6 14.♕xb7 ♘a5 15.♕b4 ♗g7 16.♘c3 ♗f6 17.♗f4 ♔f7 18.♖e1 ♘c6 19.♕c5 ♕d7 20.♘a4 ♖d8 21.♘b6 ♕b7 22.♖c1 ♘b8 23.b4 h5 24.♗c7 ♖f8 25.a4 ♘h6 26.♘e5+ ♔g7 27.a5 ♘g4 28.♘f3 ♘h6 29.h4 ♘f7 30.♗f4 ♘d7, and Black resigned in Wang Hao-Markos, Beijing 2008) 14.♕e3 ♖c8 15.♘c3 ♕d6 16.g3 g6 17.♗h3 ♗h6 18.♕e2 ♖c6 19.♗g5 ♔f8 20.♖e1 ♔g7 21.♗xh6+ ♘xh6 22.♗xe6 ♖e8 23.♘xd5 ♘g4 24.♕d2 ♘f6 25.♕xa5 b6 26.♘xf6 exf6 27.♕d2 ♖e7 28.♔g2 b5 29.h4 h5 30.♗b3 ♖cc7 31.d5, and Black resigned in Wang Hao-Timofeev, Nizhny Novgorod 2007.

11...e6 12.a3 ♘ge7 13.♘bd2 ♘f5 14.♗d3 ♗e7 15.♕b1 ♕d7

It might have been simpler to play 15... ♘xe3 16.fxe3 ♗h5, with the idea of ... ♗g6, for example: 17.♖c1 ♗g6 18.♗xg6 hxg6 19.♕d3 ♕b6 20.♖c2 0-0 21.♖ac1 ♖fc8 22.♕b3 ♕a7 23.♖c3, and drawn in Batsanin-Denisov, Novokuznetsk 2001.

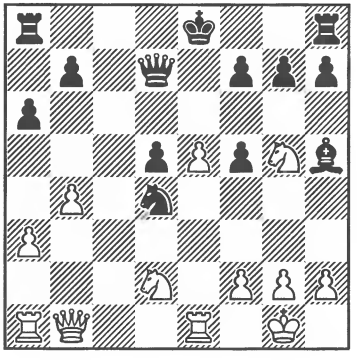
16.b4 ♗h5

Again, 16...♗d8 or 16...♘xe3 17.fxe3 (17.♖xe3) 17...♗h5 were worth looking into.

17.♗xf5!?

An interesting novelty. The move previously played was 17.♖a2?! 0-0 18.h3, and after a game which was certainly not error-free, White overcame his opposition in Morozevich-Petursson, London 1994.

17...exf5 18.♗g5 ♗xg5 19.♘xg5 ♘xd4



20.♘b3!

This move came as a complete surprise to me. These were the variations I had looked at:

1) 20.♕d3 ♘e6 21.♕xf5 ♗g6 22.♕g4 h5 (or 22...♘xg5 23.♕xg5 0-0) 23.♕h4 0-0 24.♘xe6 fxe6, with approximate equality;

2) 20.e6 20...♘xe6 (20...fxe6 21.♕d3 h6 22.♕xd4 hxg5 23.♘b3, with strong compensation for the two pawns) 21.♘xe6 (21.♕xf5 ♗g6 22.♕h3 0-0) 21...fxe6 22.♕xf5 ♗f7 23.♘f3 0-0, with an even game.

20...♘e2+!?

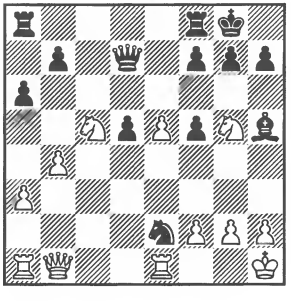
After 20...♘e6 21.♕xf5 ♗g6 22.♕g4 or 20...♘xb3 21.e6, White would have an easy game and the upper hand.

21.♔h1

21.♖xe2!? deserved consideration, but Black should be able to defend with accurate play, for example: 21...♗xe2 22.♘d4 (22.e6 fxe6 23.♘d4 ♗g4 24.♘gxe6 f4! – a resource that saves Black time and again) 22...♗g4 23.h3 (23.e6 fxe6 24.♘gxe6 f4 25.♘c5 ♕e7) 23...♕e7 24.f4 h6.

21...b6?

A mistake, which could have been fatal had White played accurately. Black had to finish developing, by 21...0-0! 22.♘c5 (22.g4 is not so strong here, because White no longer has the threat of e5-e6, as she would with the king still on e8: 22...♗xg4 23.f3 ♗h5 24.♖xe2 h6):



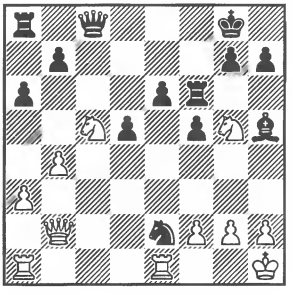
In this position, during the game I only looked at 22...♕c8, but Black has other possibilities:

1) 22...♕e7?! 23.♕xf5 ♗g6 (23...g6 24.♕f6; here, compared to the 22...♕d8 variation, Black's queen is undefended, so she has to allow the trade 24...♕xf6

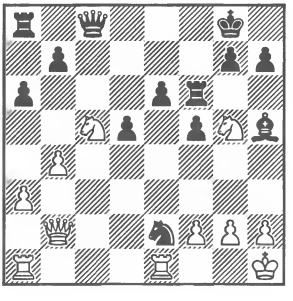
25.exf6, with the better ending for White) 24.♕g4 ♘c3 25.e6 f6 26.♘h3 ♘e4 27.♖ac1, and White has the better position;

2) 22...♕d8!? 23.♕xf5 g6 24.♕f6 b6 25.♕xd8 (25.♘d3 h6 26.♘h3 ♗g4 27.f3 ♗xh3 28.♖xe2 ♗f5, and Black is no worse) 25...♖fxd8 26.♘a4 b5 27.♘c5 h6 28.♘h3 g5, when the game is about even;

3) 22...♕c8:



3a) 23.e6!? (this move leads to interesting positions, where both sides have chances) 23...fxe6 24.♕b2!? (24.♘gxe6 ♖f6 25.♘g5 h6 26.♘h3 [26.♘f3 ♗xf3 27.gxf3 ♘f4] 26...b6 27.♘d3 f4, and Black goes on the attack; 24.♕d3 ♖f6 25.♖xe2 would lead to the variation examined after 24.♕b2) 24...♖f6:



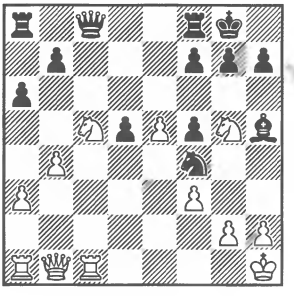
3a1) 25.f3 ♘f4 26.♖ac1, with a complicated game;

3a2) 25.g4 ♗xg4 26.f3 ♘f4 27.fxg4 h6, and White's knights are no better than Black's pawns;

3a3) 25.♕e5 b6 26.♘cxe6 h6 27.f3 (27.♘c7 hxg5 28.♕xd5+ ♔h7 29.♘xa8 ♕b8, with more than enough compensation) 27...hxg5 28.♖xe2 ♕c4, and Black stands better;

3a4) 25.♖xe2 ♗xe2 26.♕xe2 b6 27.♘d3 ♕c3 (27...h6 28.♖c1 ♕e8 29.♘f3 ♖c8 is also possible, with about equal play) 28.♖c1 ♕xa3 29.♕d1 (29.♖c7?! e5 30.♕h5? h6, and Black wins). It might seem that Black's cut-off queen and pieces scattered all across the board would be unable to offer White any resistance, but Black finds counterplay: 29...a5 30.♘f4 axb4 31.♘gxe6 b3 32.♘c7 b2 33.♕xd5+ ♔h8. White's attack is at an end, while Black's passed pawns remain.

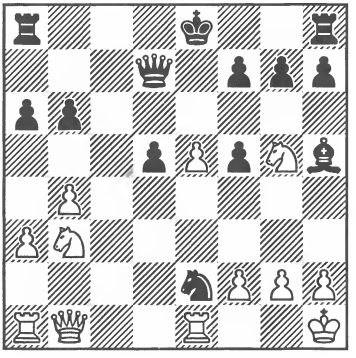
3b) 23.f3 ♘f4 (another interesting idea is 23...b6 24.e6 bxc5 25.♕xf5 ♗g6 26.exf7+ ♔h8 [or 26...♖xf7!? 27.♕xc8+ ♖xc8 28.♘xf7 ♔xf7 29.♖xe2 c4 30.♖d2 ♔e6] 27.♕xc8 ♖axc8 28.♖xe2 c4 29.♖d2 c3 30.♖xd5 h6 31.♘e4 ♗xe4 32.fxe4 ♖xf7, with a roughly equal endgame) 24.♖c1:



I rejected 21...0-0 because of this position, not noticing that I could play 24...♘e2, when White hardly has

anything better than repeating moves by 25.♖e1 ♘f4.

But let's return to the game.



22.g4?

After using up almost all of her remaining time, White chooses what must be the most unfortunate continuation available, and gives Black counterplay. She had several attractive moves which would have forced Black to pay for her inaccuracies:

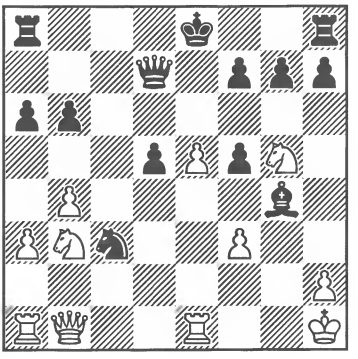
1) 22.e6 fxe6 23.f3 (23.♕b2 h6) 23...♘f4 24.♕xf5 ♖f8 25.♕e5, with advantage;

2) 22.♕d3! (this was the move I feared most during the game) 22...♘f4 (22...♕b5 23.♕xf5) 23.♕e3 ♘e6 (23...h6 24.e6 fxe6 25.♕xf4 hxg5 26.♕xf5 ♗f7 27.♘d4, with advantage to White) 24.♘xe6 fxe6 25.♕xb6, with advantage;

3) 22.♕b2!? ♘f4 23.e6 fxe6 24.♕d4 h6 25.♕xf4 hxg5 26.♕xf5, transposing into the variations examined above.

22...♗xg4 23.f3 ♘c3

I was satisfied with my position here, believing that White would have great difficulty finding a move. But in fact matters are not so simple. The game has become sharp and complex, and every move carries a high price tag.



24.♕c1?

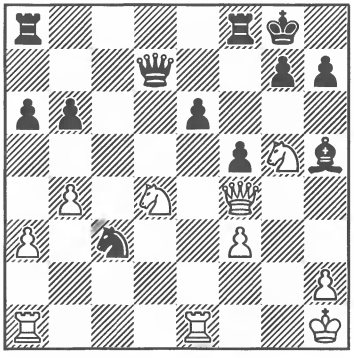
Now the initiative really does go over to Black; whereas 24.♕d3! would have left the position unclear. I intended to play 24...♘e4, but after 25.fxe4 fxe4 26.♕g3, my long-planned 26...h6? would not work, because of 27.e6 ♗xe6 (27...fxe6 28.♘xe4 would also lose) 28.♘xe6 ♕xe6 29.♕xg7, with a decisive advantage. Also bad would be 26...0-0? 27.♖g1, with an attack. My best chance was 26...♕f5, but after 27.h4, Black would still have a lot of problems to overcome. For example: 27...♕g6 (evidently strongest: 27...♗h5? 28.♖f1 ♕g6 29.♖xf7 h6 30.♕h3 ♖d8 31.♖f6 gxf6 32.♕e6+ ♔f8 33.♖f1 hxg5 34.♖xf6+ ♕f7 35.♕xb6 ♖e8 36.♘c5, with an attack; 27...h6 28.♖f1 hxg5 [28...♕g6 29.♘xf7 0-0 30.♘d6] 29.♖xf5 ♖xh4+ 30.♔g2 ♗xf5 31.♕e3 ♖c8 32.♘d4, and Black does not have enough compensation for the sacrificed queen) 28.♘d4 (28.♕xg4 h6 29.♖ac1 hxg5 30.♖c8+) 28...♗d7, with an unclear game, although I'd rather have White.

Note also that 24.♕c2!? isn't too good, in view of 24...♖c8 (24...♗xf3+ 25.♘xf3 ♘e4) 25.♕d3 ♘e4 (25...d4 26.e6 ♕d5 27.exf7+ ♔d7) 26.fxe4 fxe4 27.♕g3. This is a position from the 24.♕d3 variation, but with an extra tempo for Black. Now 27...h6? 28.e6 ♗xe6 29.♘xe6 would be bad for Black.

24...d4 25.e6 fxe6 26.♕f4

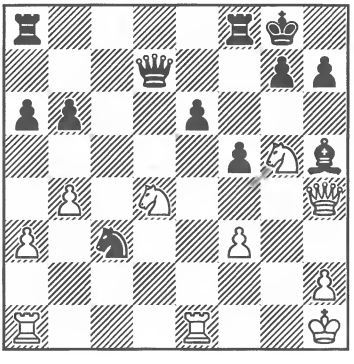
26.♖xe6+?? doesn't work because of 26...♕xe6 27.♘xe6 ♗xf3+ 28.♔g1 ♘e2+ 29.♔f2 ♘xc1.

26...0-0 27.♘xd4 ♗h5



28.♕h4?

This looks like the decisive error. White should have chosen 28.♘dxe6 ♖f6 29.♕e5 (29.♕c4? ♖c8 30.♘c5+ ♕d5 31.♕xc3 bxc5 would be bad, but 29.♖ac1 ♖c8 30.♕e5 h6 31.♖xc3 ♖xc3 32.♕xc3 hxg5 33.♘xg5 ♖c6 34.♕e5, with approximate equality, or 29.♕e5 ♕c6 [29...♖xe6 30.♕xe6+ ♕xe6 31.♘xe6 ♗xf3+ 32.♔g1 ♖c8] 30.♖ac1 ♗xf3+ 31.♔g1 ♘e2+ 32.♕xe2 ♕xc1 33.♘xf3 ♕xa3 [33...♕c3] 34.♕g2 ♖a7, with an unclear game, were quite playable) 29...♕c6 30.♖ac1 ♗xf3+ 31.♔g1 ♘e2+ 32.♕xe2 ♕xc1 33.♘xf3, with chances for both sides.



28...♖f6!

A very accurate move. After 28...♗g6 29.♖xe6 ♖f6 30.♖xf6 gxf6 31.♘ge6, the position would remain unclear.

29.♘dxe6?

With her flag about to fall, White plays one more unfortunate move – although even after 29.♖ac1 ♘d5, the advantage would still lie with Black.

29... h6!

One more accurate move practically ends the game.

30.♕xh5 hxg5 31.♘xg7 ♕xg7

And in the time scramble, White made a few more moves, and then stopped the clocks.

32.♖e8+ ♖xe8 33.♕xe8+ ♖f8 34.♕e6+ ♔h7 35.♖e1 ♕f6

36.♕d7+ ♖f7 37.♕e8 ♘d5

White resigned.

Buoyed by my success in Samara, I attended several training seminars with Yuri Razuvaev. I also played in an international women's tournament, the Northern Urals Cup, in Krasnoturinsk.

The tournaments in this small town in the northern Ural Mountains continued a fine tradition of holding elite round-robin women's tournaments. I came along too late for the famous women's competitions in honor of March 8 (International Women's Day), held in Belgrade, which drew a very strong field. When the March 8 tournaments were suspended, there came a lull in women's chess, which the Krasnoturinsk organizers attempted to break; and in this, they succeeded completely. Nowadays, more and more organizers are starting to hold women's round-robin events.

With the Russian Championship Cup, Samara, May 2005

In 2005, there were hardly any such tournaments, with Krasnoturinsk being the lone "women's Linares." I played in the Northern Urals only in 2005, but from year to year, both the organization and the player lineup have remained on the highest of levels.

Again, a few words from my diary. This is from 6/30/2005:

Today, I have to travel again – on the road, to the Urals. I'll see my Grandma and Grandpa. Once again, I go into the unknown, to play in some tournament. I try not to think about it. Since I can never predict how things will go. So for now, I look forward to a change of scenery and to seeing my relatives. In the end, however the tournament may work out, I am bound to try to bring back with me more than I bring to it. Thoughts, impressions, love....

No. 36 Ruy López C78

A. Kosteniuk – A. Stefanova

Krasnoturinsk 2005

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 a6 4.♗a4 ♘f6 5.0-0 b5 6.♗b3 ♗c5

Antoaneta and I have had a genuine theoretical discussion in this variation. For the moment, the results are trending in my favor. After my wins in our games at the World Mind Sports Games (Beijing 2008), Stefanova hasn't repeated the line. Even the most solid openings sometimes require time off for repairs.

7.a4 ♗b7 8.d3 b4

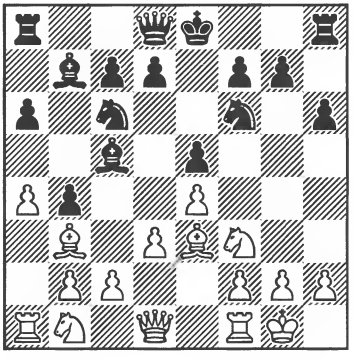
In Krasnoturinsk 2004, this move brought Antoaneta a victory over Alisa Galliamova. But this time, Fortune would not be on Stefanova's side.

With my grandparents, Krasnoturinsk, July 2005

9.♗g5

9.a5 and 9.♘bd2 have been played also.

9...h6 10.♗e3



10...d6?!

A move that surprised me greatly. Black undervalues her pawn structure, while giving herself a number of weaknesses.

11.♗xc5 dxc5 12.a5 0-0 13.♘bd2 ♖e8 14.♘c4 ♘d7 15.c3 ♘f8 16.g3 ♕f6

Perhaps 16...♘g6 was better, not allowing White to execute her plan of ♘h4 and f2-f4.

17.♘h4 ♘e6 18.♘e3 ♖ad8

During the game, I looked mainly at 18...♘e7, preventing White from playing ♘d5. For example, 19.♘g4 ♕g5 20.♗xe6 fxe6 21.f4 exf4 22.♖xf4, threatening ♘f6+ and ♖g4.

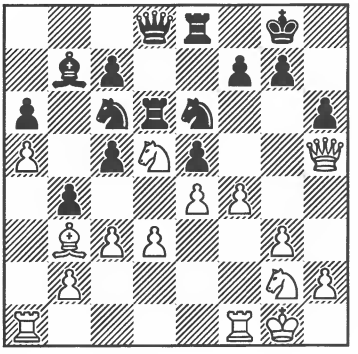
19.♘d5 ♕g5 20.♘g2 ♖d6

20...♖d7 would have been interesting, protecting the f7 square a second time.

21.f4 ♕d8

I thought the immediate capture on f4 – 21...exf4 – was more accurate, since taking with the knight now would not be as strong.

22.♕h5



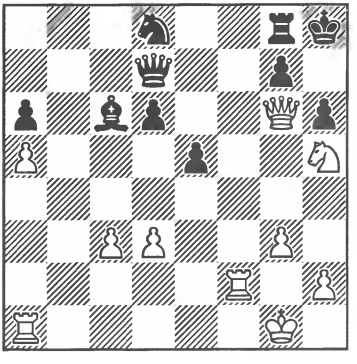
22...exf4? (the decisive error) **23.♘dxf4! ♕d7 24.♘xe6**

Here and on every move hereafter, White has a number of ways to win. I continued to select the simplest and most natural moves, which in this sort of position frequently turn out to be the strongest.

24...fxe6 25.♘f4 bxc3 26.bxc3 ♘d8 27.♕xc5 (27.e5!? would have been good, too) **27...♔h7 28.♗a4 ♗c6 29.e5 ♗xa4 30.exd6 cxd6 31.♕h5 ♗c6**

Had Black succeeded in posting both her bishop and her queen on the long diagonal, then there would have been no hint of a White advantage. But the weakness of the king at h7 and the unfortunate position of Black's pieces allow White to count on Black's being unable to carry out that sort of regrouping.

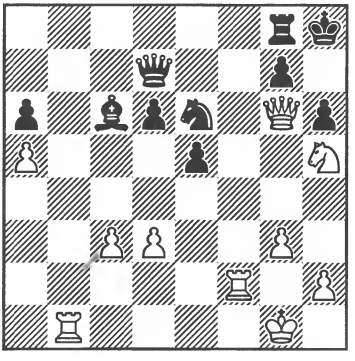
32.♕g6+ ♔h8 33.♘h5 e5 34.♖f2 ♖g8



35.♖b1!

Now the threats are ♖b4 and ♘f6. Once again White demonstrates the truth of the principle that all of one's pieces must take part in the attack.

35...♘e6



36.♘xg7!

This was called the best move of the tournament. I received a souvenir for it from the Russian chess composition magazine *Uralsky Problemist*. I won't deny that it's very nice to be able to make such a move in an actual game.

Of course, I could also have won by means of the less elegant, but scarcely less effective 36.♖f7 ♘f8 (36...♕e8 37.♘f6) 37.♕xg7+ ♖xg7 38.♖xf8+, with a simple win; but then somebody else would probably have won the prize for the tournament's best move.

36...♘g5

After 36...♖xg7 37.♖b8+ ♘d8 38.♖f8+, White mates; and on 36...♕xg7 37.♕xe6, the win is also not far off.

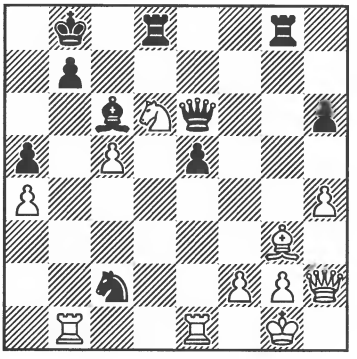
37.♕xh6+ ♘h7 38.♘f5. Black resigned.

In my game with Xu Yuhua, I overlooked a winning continuation, and unfortunately lost.

No. 37

A. Kosteniuk – Xu Yuhua

Krasnoturinsk 2005



28.♖xe5

The winning line was 28.♘xb7! ♗xb7 29.♖xe5 ♕a2 (29...♕c8 30.c6! ♕xc6 31.♖xa5+ ♔c8 32.♕h3+ ♖d7 33.♖a8+ ♗xa8 34.♖xb8#) 30.c6! ♕xb1+ 31.♖e1+! It was just this last move that I failed to see when calculating this variation.

28...♕a2 29.♖d1 ♔a8 30.h5

Here I could have set a pretty trap by 30.♕h3!?, and if 30...♗d7?? (30...♕xa4 would be a better choice, with an inferior, though playable, position), then 31.c6!.

30...♕xa4 31.♕h4?

Desperation. White might still have played on after 31.♖c1 ♕a3 32.♖d1.

31...♕xh4 32.♗xh4 ♖xg2+ 33.♔f1 ♖h2 34.♗xd8 ♗f3

White resigned. I ended up sharing second and third places with Xu Yuhua, placing third on tiebreak. The 2005 Southern Urals Cup went to Humpy Koneru.

In August 2005, I played on the Russian team in the European Team Championship. This time, the sizes of the men's and the women's teams

were equalized: each had four regular players plus one reserve. The Russian women's team was as follows: I played on first board, Nadezhda Kosintseva was on second, Ekaterina Kovalevskaya played on third, fourth was Tatiana Kosintseva, and our reserve board was Alisa Galliamova. Of course we hoped that increasing the number of boards would help us secure the prized gold medal – but we ended up taking only the bronze. Playing brilliantly, the Polish team finished first.

Immediately after the European Championship, I went on to Mainz, where I competed for the chance to play a match for the title of Women's World Champion – Chess960, planned for the summer of 2006.

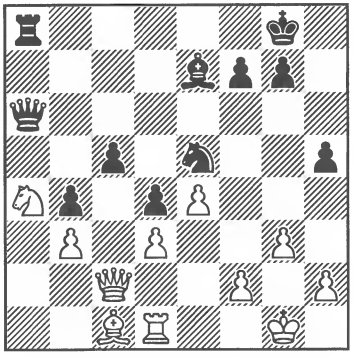
In September 2005 I decided to play in the men's national championship in Kazan. The Upper League of the Russian Men's Championship turned out to be very interesting, and a most serious test: I scored 4 points out of 9. The critical moment of the tournament for me was my sixth-round game: had I not overlooked a winning continuation in my game against Valery Popov, everything might have turned out differently. Instead of winning that game, I even managed to lose. I did manage to win my final-round game, though, so at least the tournament ended on a positive note.

In front of a poster for the Northern Urals Cup, Krasnoturinsk, July 2005

No. 38

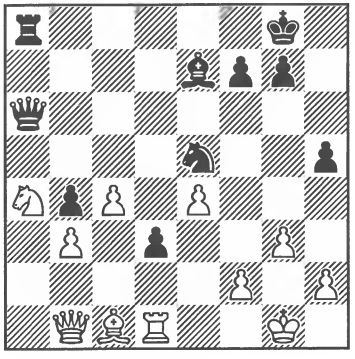
V. Popov – A. Kosteniuk

Kazan 2005



28...c4! 29.dxc4 d3! 30.♕b1

Here all I had to do was to find my third consecutive move worthy of an exclamation mark.



30...♕g6?

The right move was 30...♕e6!, which also attacks the e4-pawn – but not directly (as from g6), but indirectly, due to the threat of 31...♘f3+. White has a fairly wide selection of moves here, but none of them provides an adequate defense:

1) 31.f4 ♕g4 32.♗e3 ♕e2, with unstoppable threats;

2) 31.♗f4 ♘f3+ 32.♔g2 ♕xe4 33.♕xd3 ♘e1+, and wins;

3) 31.♔g2 ♕g4 32.♗f4 h4 33.h3 (33.♗xe5 h3+ 34.♔f1 ♕e2+ 35.♔g1 ♕f3 and mates) 33...♕f3+ 34.♔g1 ♖xa4! 35.♗xe5 ♗c5, and Black gets to the white king;

4) 31.♖xd3 ♘xd3 32.♕xd3 ♖d8 33.♕e2 ♕g4, and wins.

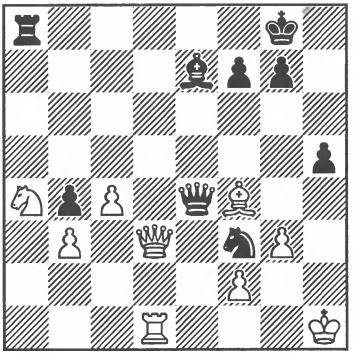
31.♗f4 ♘f3+ 32.♔f1

32.♔h1 d2 33.♕d3 ♕g4 leads to a position with chances for both sides.

32...♕xe4?!

It often happens that when you can't find the winning line, you lose the thread of the game and start making second-best moves – especially in time pressure. The right move here was 32...d2!?, with an unclear game after 33.♗xd2 ♕g4 34.♗f4 h4.

33.♕xd3 ♘xh2+ 34.♔g1 ♘f3+ 35.♔f1 ♘h2+ 36.♔g1 ♘f3+ 37.♔h1

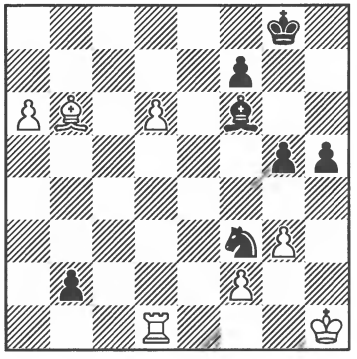


37...♕c6?

The decisive error. I should have played 37...f5, with drawing chances. Because of the weakness of his king, White could not allow the enemy rook access to his first rank. For example: 38.♕d5+ ♔h7 39.♕xe4 fxe4 40.♖d7 ♗f6 41.c5 ♘d4.

38.♕d5 ♕xd5 39.cxd5 g5 40.♗c7 ♗f6 41.d6 ♖a7 42.♗b6 ♖xa4

43.bxa4 b3 44.a5 b2 45.a6



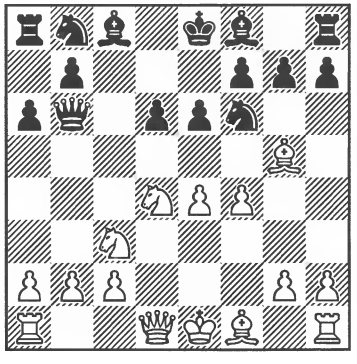
Black resigned.

No. 39 Sicilian Defense B97

A. Kosteniuk – D. Obolenskih

Kazan 2005

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 a6 6.♗g5 e6 7.f4 ♕b6



8.a3!?

I didn't want a theoretical discussion in the main lines arising after 8.♕d2 ♕xb2, so I decided to play something a little "fresher." Although the move 8.a3 is an infrequent guest in modern-day practice, it has been played a few times by members of the chess elite. See, for example, the games Timman-Van der Wiel, Amsterdam 1991; Ivanchuk-Topalov, Dos Hermanas 1996; and Leko-Shirov, Wijk aan Zee 2001.

8...♘bd7

Other possibilities are 8...♘c6 and 8...♗e7.

9.♗h4!?

In this position, this move is new, although later I discovered the game Murey-Ftáčnik, Hastings 1982/83, which featured the exact same maneuver.

9...♗e7 10.♗f2 ♕c7 11.g4

I should not have hurried with this move, since now Black can always play ...d6-d5, breaking up the position. I should have played 11.♕f3 first, and waited to see Black's reply. If he chooses the plan with ...b7-b5, then I can go ahead with g2-g4. But if he plays ...♘c5, then I simply castle, and only then do I start pushing my pawns.

11...♘c5

11...h6 12.♗g2 g5 13.h4 gxf4 14.g5 ♘g8 15.♕h5 ♘e5 16.♗h3 ♘g6 17.♕g4 ♕a5 18.♘b3 ♕d8 19.♕g1 hxg5 20.♗b6 ♕d7 21.hxg5 ♗d8 22.0-0-0 ♗xb6 23.♕xb6 ♕c6 24.♕b4 ♘8e7 25.♖xd6 ♕c7 26.e5 ♘c6 27.♕c5 ♗d7 28.♘d5 exd5 29.♗xd7+ ♕xd7 30.♖xh8+ ♘xh8 31.♖xd7 ♔xd7 32.♕d6+ ♔e8 33.♘c5, and Black resigned in Nataf-Marjanović, Vrnjačka Banja 2005.

12.♗g2

12.♕f3 d5!? (12...0-0 13.g5) 13.exd5 ♘xd5 14.♘xd5 exd5, and the g4-pawn hangs: 15.0-0-0 ♘e4 16.♗e3 0-0, with mutual chances.

12...0-0?!

After this, Black has a very difficult position; he should have preferred 12...

d5!? 13.e5 ♘fe4 14.♘xe4 ♘xe4 15.♗xe4 dxe4 16.♕e2, followed by ...b7-b5 or ...b7-b6, with an unclear position.

13.g5 ♘fd7

13...♘e8 deserved consideration.

14.b4! ♘b3 15.♘cb5 axb5 16.cxb3 d5

On 16...♕c3+ 17.♔f1, Black loses a pawn, and also experiences great difficulty finding a place for his queen. For example: 17...e5 18.♖c1 (18.♘xb5 ♕c6 19.a4 exf4 20.♖c1 ♕a6 21.♔g1) 18...♕b2.

17.♕d2 dxe4 18.♗xe4 e5 19.♘f5

I think this was stronger than 19.♘dxb5.

19...♗d8 20.♖c1 ♕b8 21.0-0!

Now Black is almost in *zugzwang*. White threatens to take on c8 and then play ♕c3 or ♘d6.

21...exf4

White is better after 21...♘b6 22.♗c5 ♗xf5 23.♗xf5 ♖e8 24.fxe5 or 24.♕d3 g6 25.♕xb5.

22.♖xc8 ♕xc8 23.♖c1 ♕b8 24.♕xd7 ♗xg5 25.h4!

The most accurate move.

25...♕e5

After 25...♗f6, White plays 26.♘h6+! gxh6 27.♕f5 ♖d8, and now either 28.♕xf6 or 28.♕xh7+ ♔f8 29.♗c5+ ♖d6 30.♖d1 ♖aa6 31.♗xb7, which also wins.

26.♖e1 ♖ad8 27.♕xb7 ♕f6 28.hxg5 ♕xg5+ 29.♔f1 ♖d2

30.♕xb5 g6 31.♗h4!

Black resigned.

A nice game from the last round of this very difficult tournament. This was my first appearance in the men's Championship of Russia, and it certainly was an interesting and worthwhile experience.

After Kazan, I played in the "Golden Blitz" tournament put together by the Association of Chess Professionals. The tournament was held in the Jazz Town casino on Taganka, in Moscow, and received a lot of coverage on NTV+, a major Russian television channel. With the proper organization, and the possibility of live broadcasts on TV, blitz chess tournaments can be very interesting spectacles. For in blitz a chessplayer is frequently unable to conceal his emotions; and the fast-paced play on the board attracts viewers, even if they don't know very much about chess.

After my Upper League training, I was very well prepared for this blitz event. In the women's group, I had to play two knockout matches: semifinal and final. The luck of the draw matched me in the semifinal against my old nemesis, Zhu Chen. The match was quite tense. I won the first game; and in the second, despite an absolutely hopeless position, I managed to win on time. In the final, I overcame Almira Skripchenko, and took first place.

I cannot deny that winning blitz competitions, and playing this kind of chess in general, gives me no less of a positive feeling than winning at serious chess. I believe that rapid and blitz chess are our future. We don't need to shorten the time control in classical chess to increase its spectator appeal; instead, we just need to hold more blitz and super-blitz events, and try to get them on TV and the Internet.

No. 40 French Defense C15

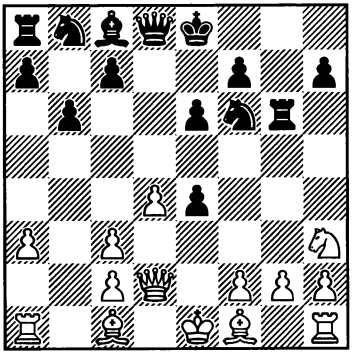
A. Kosteniuk – Zhu Chen

Moscow 2005 (blitz)

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.a3!?

Not a common sight in today's tournament praxis, but an excellent variant for use at blitz.

4...♗xc3+ 5.bxc3 dxe4 6.♕g4 ♘f6 7.♕xg7 ♖g8 8.♕h6 ♖g6 9.♕d2 b6 10.♘h3



10...♗a6?!

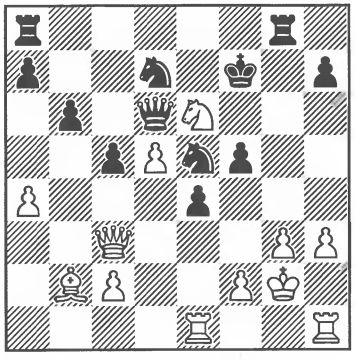
Although Black usually tries to exchange the light-squared bishops in the French Defense, in this variation the game follows different principles. The position has already opened up, and Black's light-squared bishop could turn into an asset rather than a liability. 10...♗b7 11.♘f4 ♖g8 was better, with approximately equal play.

11.c4?!

I should have exchanged bishops – 11.♗xa6 ♘xa6 12.♘f4 – especially since the trade leaves Black's knight standing on the edge of the board.

11...c5 12.♘f4 ♖g8 13.d5 exd5 14.cxd5 ♗xf1 15.♔xf1 ♕d6 16.♗b2 ♘bd7 17.a4 ♖g4 18.g3 ♘e5 19.h3 ♖g8 20.♕c3 ♘fd7 21.♖e1 f5 22.♘e6 ♔f7 23.♔g2!?

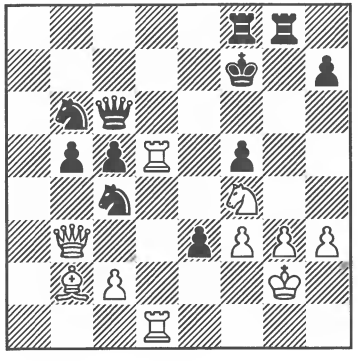
An interesting pawn sacrifice, which perhaps Black should not have accepted. The capture on d5 opens lines for the white pieces.



23...♕xd5 24.♘f4 ♕c6 25.♕e3 a6 26.♖d1 ♘c4?

And now Black's position is practically indefensible.

27.♕b3 e3+ 28.f3 b5 29.♖d5 ♖af8 30.axb5 axb5 31.♖hd1 ♘db6



32.♖d6?

Gives Black an opportunity to force a draw, whereas 32.♖xf5+ ♔e8 33.♖xf8+ ♖xf8 34.♗c1 would have won.

32...♕b7?

Missing the gift her opponent has offered her: 32...♖xg3+! 33.♔xg3 ♖g8+ was the saving line: 34.♔h2 ♕xf3 35.♖f6+ ♔e7 36.♖e6+, and draws.

33.♕xb5 ♖xg3+

Now it's too late.

34.♔xg3 ♖g8+ 35.♔h2 ♘xd6

35...♕xf3 36.♖d7+ ♔e8 37.♖xh7+ wouldn't change anything.

36.♖xd6 ♕xf3 37.♖f6+ ♔f7-e7 38.♕xc5+ ♔e8 39.♖e6+ ♔d7

Or 39...♔d8 40.♗f6+.

40.♖e7+ Black resigned.

In the fall of 2005, I again held several seminars with Yuri Sergeyevich, and then flew again to the U.S. for some rest after a tense year, and to regain my strength for new tournaments.

In November 2005, our Kaska passed away. Since 1993, she had been a full-fledged member of our family, and we were very sad when she was taken from us. Here are a few lines from my diary – 11/05/2005:

Today, our kitty is gone; and my heart still cannot accept how this could be. How could this sweet little cat, with his little white feet and little stuck-out tongue, be no longer with us? Our little kitty-cat, whom we all loved so much. She lived 12 years with us, and shall always remain in our hearts. I find it hard to believe this could have happened. I had hoped to see her one more time, to kiss her wet pink little nosey, and to make her happy, by bringing her more presents – those little toy mousies she so loved to play with. My heart cannot agree with what my brain tells me, and wants to remember again and again those moments when she was with us. I remember how she would greet us, with her tail held high, and run into the kitchen. She would always come when one of us was feeling down. Thank you, kitty, for being with us. We love you soooo much! Good-bye!

The only thing that could heal the pain in my heart from such a loss was time, which keeps on marching.

Winners of the 2005 Golden Blitz – Ruslan Ponomariov and Alexandra Kosteniuk

Chapter 8
Career and Family

A few lines from my diary, 01/09/2006:

Life goes on – there goes another year of my little life, into the past. Everything changes around me. I go on complaining, crying, laughing – being myself. I remain convinced that the most important things in life are to love and to believe that everything will turn out right. And to strive to be better.

After winning the "Golden Blitz," I had a short break between tournaments. I greeted the New Year 2006 in Las Vegas, playing in one of those American opens so famous for their democratic nature (amateurs with ratings of 2000 play for about the same prizes as the grandmasters) and a very difficult schedule – usually, two games per day.

My preparation for the 2006 World Championship, to be held in March in Ekaterinburg, was the Aeroflot Open in Moscow. It remains to this day one of my most successful appearances in men's tournaments. I scored 5/9, staying undefeated until the last round. In this tournament, I drew with such famous grandmasters as former world champion Alexander Khalifman, Alexander Motylev, Wang Yue, Bu Xiangzhi, and Alexey Korotylev. In Rounds 2 and 8, I scored victories over grandmasters Murtas Kazhgaleyev and Robert Kempinski, and only lost in the last round to Tigran Petrosian – namesake of the great world champion. My performance rating for the Aeroflot Open, even with the last-round loss, was 2657. Here's my Round 8 win.

No. 41 Sicilian Defense B28
A. Kosteniuk – R. Kempinski
Moscow 2006

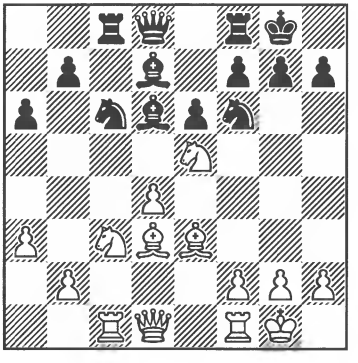
1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 a6 3.c3 d5 4.exd5 ♕xd5 5.d4 e6 6.♗e2 ♘f6 7.0-0 ♘c6 8.♗e3 cxd4 9.cxd4 ♗e7 10.♘c3 ♕d8

A typical isolated-pawn position.

11.♘e5 ♗d7 12.a3 0-0 13.♖c1

White could also have played 13.♗d3 ♖c8 14.f4 at once.

13...♖c8 14.♗d3 ♗d6

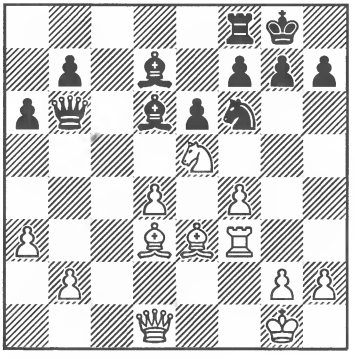


15.f4?!

White goes for broke. An earlier game between Kramnik and Karpov (Dortmund 1999), where White played more solidly, was drawn after 15.♘xd7 ♕xd7 16.♕f3 ♘e7 17.♗g5 ♘ed5 18.♗xf6 ♘xf6 19.d5 ♘xd5 20.♘xd5 ♖xc1 21.♗xh7+ ♔xh7 22.♕h5+ ♔g8

23.♘f6+ gxf6 24.♕g4+ ♔h7 25.♕h4+ ♔g7 26.♕g4+ ♔h7 27.♕h4+, with perpetual check.

15...♘e7 16.♘e4 ♘ed5 17.♘xf6+ ♘xf6 18.♖f3 ♖xc1 19.♗xc1 ♕b6 20.♗e3



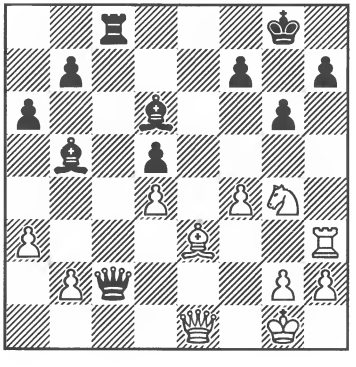
20...♖c8?

Granting White additional possibilities. Inserting 20...♗b5 21.♗b1 first was more accurate; only then should Black occupy the c-file by 21...♖c8.

21.♕b1

21.♘xd7!? ♘xd7 22.♗xh7+ ♔f8 (22...♔xh7 is bad, because 23.♖h3+ ♔g8 24.♕h5 wins the rook on c8) 23.♗d3 ♕xb2 24.f5, with the initiative, looks good.

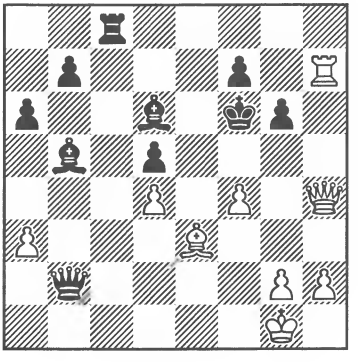
21...♗b5 22.♗c2 ♕c7 23.♗b3 ♘d5 24.♖h3 g6 25.♗xd5 exd5 26.♕e1 ♕c2 27.♘g4



27...♕xb2?

It's clear that, generally speaking, White's attack is too slow. Of course, the text move does not lose; but it does give White the chance to set her opponent some concrete problems. Black would have driven back the attack after 27...h5 28.♘f6+ (or 28.♘h6+ ♔g7 29.f5 ♕xb2 30.fxg6 fxg6 31.♖f3 ♖c2 32.♖f7+ ♔h8) 28...♔g7 29.♘xh5+ gxh5 30.♖xh5 ♖e8 31.♕g3+ ♔f8.

28.♘f6+ ♔g7 29.♖xh7+ ♔xf6 30.♕h4+



30...♔e6

Black could also have refuted the attack with the problem-like move 30...g5, for example: 31.♕xg5+ ♔e6 32.♕g4+ ♔e7 33.♕g5+ (33.♕xc8? ♕b1+! – that's the idea behind the move ...g6-g5: in all variations, the rook on h7 is now hanging) 33...♔d7 34.♕f5+ ♔c7 35.♕xf7+ ♔b6 36.♕xb7+ ♔a5 37.♕xc8 ♕b1+! (here's where the inclusion of ...g6-g5 matters) 38.♔f2 ♕xh7 39.♕d8+ ♗c7 40.♕xd5 ♕xh2 41.♗d2+ ♔b6 42.a4.

31.♕g4+ ♔e7?

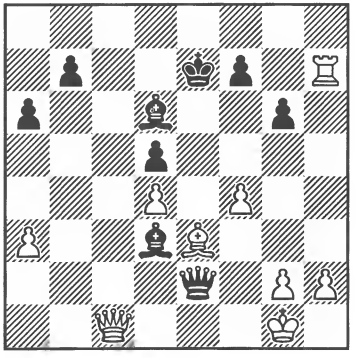
It wasn't too late to go back to 31... ♔f6.

32.♕xc8 ♕e2?

32...♕a1+ 33.♕c1 ♕xa3 was unclear.

33.♕c1 ♗d3?

Black has clearly lost the thread, and now commits the decisive error.



34.f5! ♗xf5 35.♗g5+ ♔f8 36.♗f6

Black resigned.

After a good performance at the Aeroflot Open, I set off with high hopes for the Urals. In Kamensk-Uralsky, I attended my last training sessions prior to the championship, where I was seconded by grandmaster Alexander Motylev. The World Championship in Ekaterinburg started out very well for me, as I went confidently through the first two rounds, outplaying the very solid Armenian player, Elina Danielian, in Round Two.

No. 42 Reti's Opening A07

E. Danielian – A. Kosteniuk

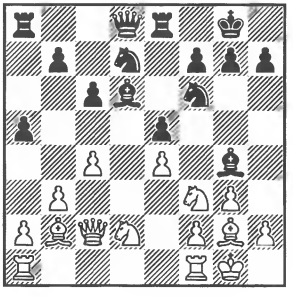
Ekaterinburg 2006 (m/1)

This game was practically won at home. We guessed the opening correctly, and after 15 moves I had a huge time advantage; five moves later, I had seized the initiative.

1.♘f3 d5 2.g3 c6 3.♗g2 ♗g4 4.0-0 ♘d7 5.d3 e6 6.♘bd2 ♗d6 7.b3 ♘gf6 8.♗b2 0-0 9.h3 ♗h5 10.c4 ♖e8 11.♕c2 e5 12.e4 dxe4 13.dxe4 a5

At home, we examined the games Şubă-Salov, Moscow 1986, and Hickl-M. Gurevich, Jakarta 1996 as examples of how to play this variation correctly, as in those games, all the main ideas for Black were revealed and convincingly carried out. All that remained for me to do was to demonstrate the fruits of our successful homework:

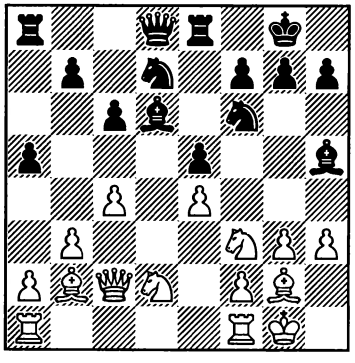
1.♘f3 ♘f6 2.g3 d5 3.♗g2 c6 4.0-0 ♗g4 5.c4 e6 6.b3 ♘bd7 7.♗b2 ♗d6 8.d3 0-0 9.♘bd2 ♖e8 10.♕c2 e5 11.e4 dxe4 12.dxe4 a5:



1) 13.a3 ♗c5! 14.♗c3 ♕b6 15.h3 ♗h5 16.♕b2 ♗xf3 17.♗xf3 ♗d4 18.♗g2 ♗xc3 19.♕xc3 c5 20.♖ab1 ♕c7 (intending to bring the knight to d4 via ...♘d7-f8-e6) 21.♖fe1, and after some complex play, the game ended in a draw: Şubă-Salov, Moscow 1986;

2) 13.♘h4 ♗c5 14.h3 ♗h5 15.♘f5 ♕b6 (intending ...♖ad8) 16.♖ae1 ♖ad8 17.♘b1 (planning ♘c3-a4) 17...♗b4!? 18.♖e3?! (18.♘c3 ♘c5 with the idea ...♘e6-d4) 18...♘f8 19.♖d3 ♖xd3 20.♕xd3 ♘6d7 (to be followed up by ...f7-f6, ...♗f7-e6) 21.♘a3?! (21.♘c3 f6 22.♘a4 ♘c5 23.♘xc5 ♗xc5 with the more comfortable

game for Black) 21...♖d8!? 22.♗c1 (22.♘c2 ♘c5 23.♕e3 ♗d2 24.♘e7+ ♔h8 25.♘c8 ♗xe3 26.♘xb6 ♘d3!? 27.♘xe3 ♘xb2, with a small advantage for Black) 22...♘e6 23.g4 (23.♘c2 ♘dc5 24.♕e3 ♖d3 loses) 23...♗g6, with a slightly better position in Hickl-M. Gurevich, Jakarta 1996. After some complex play, Black went on to win.



14.a3 ♕b6 15.♘h4 ♖ad8 16.♘f5 ♗f8 17.♗c3 ♘c5 18.b4?!

Clearly Black has jumped ahead of her opponent in development, so beginning active play in this situation must be somewhat risky.

18...axb4 19.axb4 ♘d3 20.b5 ♗b4 21.♘b3?

White has to play very accurately in order not to lose material. She should have tried to trade off as many pieces as possible; then she wouldn't need to think about defending them. For example: 21.♗xb4 ♘xb4 22.♕a4!? (22.♕c3?! ♘d3 23.bxc6? ♗e2! 24.cxb7 ♗xf1 25.♖xf1 ♕xb7) 22...♘d3 23.♕a7.

21...♗xc3

Perhaps the immediate capture, 21... cxb5 22.c5 ♕c6, was more exact.

22.♕xc3 cxb5 23.c5 ♕c7

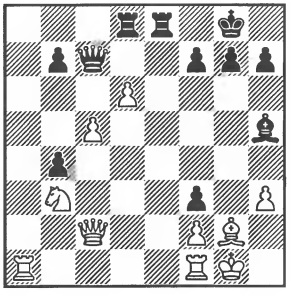
23...b4 would not work, because of 24.♕xd3 ♖xd3 25.cxb6 ♖xb3 26.♖ab1, with equality.

24.♘e3 b4

24...♕c6! deserved consideration.

25.♕c4?

25.♕c2 would offer stiffer resistance. During the game, I had calculated some pretty though non-forcing variations in response to this: 25...♘f4!? 26.gxf4 exf4 27.♘d5 ♘xd5 28.exd5 f3 29.d6. Here, Black would have a choice to make:



29...♕c6 (29...♕d7 30.♗h1 ♕xh3 31.♖fe1 with an unclear game; 29...♖xd6 30.♖fe1 ♖f8 31.♗f1 ♖g6+ 32.♔h1, and the position is unclear) 30.♖fe1 (30.♗h1? ♖xd6 and Black wins) 30...fxg2 31.♘d4 ♕c8, when Black is ahead on material, but in a rather sharp position requiring accurate play.

25...♗e2 26.♘d5

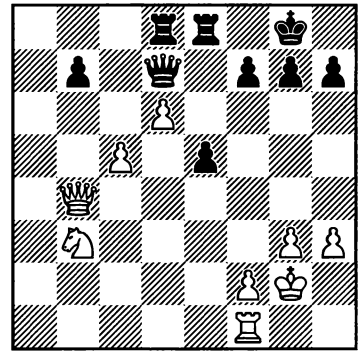
After 26.♖fb1, White loses her center pawn: 26...♘f4 27.♕xb4 ♘xg2 28.♔xg2 ♗d3.

26...♘xd5 27.exd5 ♘f4 28.d6 ♕d7

Less accurate would be either 28...♖xd6, because of 29.♕xb4 ♖g6 30.♖fe1, with an unclear game; or 28...♕xd6 29.cxd6 ♗xc4 30.gxf4 ♗xf1 31.♗xf1 exf4 32.d7.

29.♕xb4 ♘xg2 30.♔xg2 ♗xf1+ 31.♖xf1

Although Black is the exchange up, it will not be easy to bring home the point, considering my opponent's central pawn mass.



31...e4

On 31...♖a8, 32.♘a5 is unpleasant; while 31...b6 leads to a drawn endgame after 32.cxb6 ♕c6+ 33.♔g1 ♕xd6 34.♕xd6 ♖xd6 35.b7 ♖b8 36.♘c5 ♖b6 37.♘d7 ♖6xb7 38.♘xb8 ♖xb8.

32.♘d4

32.♘a5!? would have been interesting.

32...♖a8

It seemed more important to me to seize the open file than to open up the enemy king position. But it would still have been more accurate to first play 32...e3 33.fxe3 ♖xe3.

33.♖b1 ♖a7

And here, 33...e3 would actually lose: 34.♕xb7 ♕xb7+ 35.♖xb7 e2 36.♘xe2 ♖xe2 37.c6 – it's a well-known fact that two connected passed pawns on the sixth rank often beat a rook.

34.♕c4?

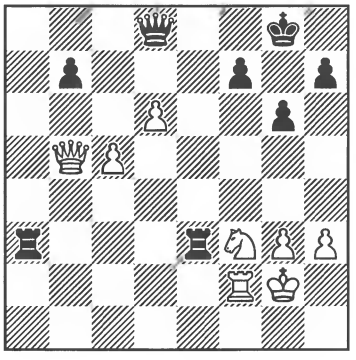
34.♘b5 was correct, putting the question to Black of how she intends to improve her position.

34...e3!

After this, White's position can no longer be held.

35.fxe3 ♖xe3 36.♖f1 g6 37.♕b5 ♕d8 38.♖f2 ♖aa3 39.♘f3

On 39.♘e2, Black wins with 39...♕g5.



39...♖eb3

The most accurate continuation here would have been 39...♕f6! 40.d7 (40.♕xb7 ♖xf3 41.♖xf3 ♖a2+ 42.♔g1 ♕d4+) 40...♖xf3 41.d8♕+ ♕xd8 42.♖xf3 ♖a2+ 43.♖f2 (43.♔g1 ♕d4+ 44.♔h1 ♖a1+) 43...♕d5+ 44.♔g1 ♖a1+ 45.♖f1 ♕d4+, when Black delivers a study-like mate: 46.♔h1 ♕e4+ 47.♔g1 ♕e3+ 48.♔h1 ♕f3+ 49.♔g1 ♕xg3+ 50.♔h1♕xh3 51.♔g1 ♕e3 52.♔h1 ♖a2.

40.♕c4 ♕d7 41.g4 ♕c6 42.♕f4 ♖d3 43.♕f6 ♕xc5 44.♖e2 ♕c6 45.g5 ♖xf3

White resigned.

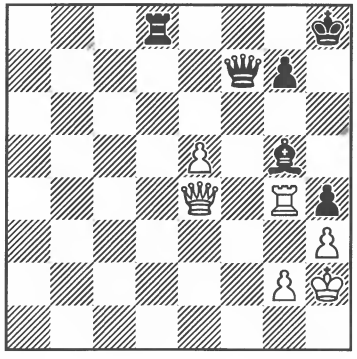
I won the second game of our match, though not without some adventures. In the third and fatal (for me) round, I was to face Viktorija Cmilyte. I played this match very poorly. In the first game, with White, we guessed the opening variation correctly; but I forgot the continuation we had intended to play, and after wasting a full hour, chose a dubious move, after which I had to fight to save the draw. In the second game Viktorija, playing White, outplayed me in the endgame in classical style after I committed a number of grievous errors. So once again, just as she had in Elista, Viktorija knocked me off the list of candidates for the chess crown.

Nevertheless, my rating on the April 1, 2006, list reached its record high of 2540. On the FIDE rating list of the strongest women players, I was third in the world.

I didn't play anywhere in April or May, but I was still very busy. The next important event for me would be the World Chess Olympiad in Turin. For reasons unknown to me, right before the Olympiad the Russian Chess Federation decided to replace all our coaches, and removed Yakovich from his position as Head Coach. His place as team trainer was taken by Yuri Dokhoian, who might in fact be a good chess specialist; however, women's team events have their own specific requirements, and the players need to be treated in a particular way. Additionally, after this change, the team was forced to forget about meeting together for training seminars, because Dokhoian did not feel it necessary to work with the entire team. It's my opinion that the chief trainer for the women's team ought to be a person who should be at least equally interested in the success of every team member.

I started well in Turin, with 2½ out of 3; in Round 3, I outplayed the strong Polish player Iweta Radziewicz. In the fifth round, in the important match against Ukraine, my game against their team's leader, Natalia Zhukova, reached the following position:

N. Zhukova – A. Kosteniuk
Turin 2006



The game had long since entered the phase where we had only the 30-second increment to make each of our moves. It was very warm in the playing hall, and at a certain point, I lost my concentration for a second, and asked our team captain to bring me some water. For this momentary lapse, I paid an immediate price:

53...♗e7??

Not for nothing has it been said that chess is about paying attention. As soon as a player loses focus, the errors crowd in – sometimes with fatal results. With a piece plus, Black's last move not only costs her the whole of her advantage, but gives her a lost ending – by force! I could have played 53...♕e7 54.♕f5 ♗h6, or 53...♗h6 immediately, either way with excellent winning chances. But in the game, after

54.♖xh4+!

although I kept on struggling, I had to admit defeat by move 89.

My loss in this game cost us the match against Ukraine, who went on to win the Olympiad. We took second place; and after Turin, the entire "blame" for our silver medals was laid on that horrible blunder. I'm willing to agree that that bit of blindness helped Ukraine to win the key match. But this was only Round 5, and the whole battle was still ahead of us.

When I was a child, I considered myself a team player; and for many years, I dreamed of playing for the national team. But later, when my dream finally came true, I was very disappointed that for some reason, our team did not always manage to give a full 100%. I have already spoken out many times about team spirit. If there are reasons why we do not succeed in making ourselves a team, then I see only one way out: for every one of us to come to team competitions in good form, and win those chess games. The USSR men's team also often had problems with relations between team members. That's because all chessplayers are individualists through and through, accustomed to pretty much playing only for themselves throughout their careers. But in this case, we need to think of the team's interests, which is not to everybody's taste. Every time that I play for our team, I hope that we will show, once again, that Russia is a nation of great chess traditions. In spite of whatever difficult moments we may have had to endure in our period of growth, we now have a strong young team, which must always fight for the gold. And during team competitions, we must strive to become, first of all, a team.

In August 2006, I traveled once again to Mainz, where I was to play an eight-game match against Elizabeth Pähtz, to determine the first Women's World

Team Russia on the way to the World Chess Olympiad in Turin, 2006. Left to right: Ekaterina Kovalevskaya, Alexandra Kosteniuk, Tatiana Kosintseva, Nadezhda Kosintseva

With FIDE President Kirsan Ilyumzhinov and team coaches Yuri Dokhoian (left) and Alexander Rustemov

Champion in "Chess960" – or, as some still call it, "Fischerandom Chess." Hans-Walther Schmitt, the irreplaceable festival organizer, every year finds ways to improve the tournament; and every summer, one sees more and more strong players in Mainz.

In the mornings, the tournament hall is given over to the numerous participants in the open tournaments. In the evenings, on stage we have the matches that determine world champions in Rapid and Fischerandom Chess. The spectators can not only watch these interesting encounters, but also listen to grandmaster commentary. In addition, special screens, visible only to the spectators, show the computers' evaluations of the current position.

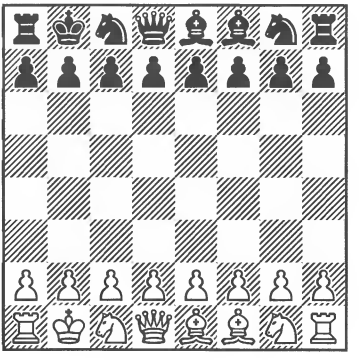
I like playing Fischerandom Chess very much, because here there can be no endless replaying of opening variations. You don't need to spend the whole morning before the round anxiously trying to guess what opening your opponent will play; instead, you can take a leisurely walk along the Rhine riverbank. In Fischerandom Chess, the opening position is selected at random immediately before the game starts, and the thinking begins at move one. The pawns in the Fischerandom Chess starting position are placed normally. The pieces are placed according to two rules: each player must have one light-squared and one dark-squared bishop, and the king must be placed between the rooks. This reduces the number of possible starting positions down to 960. The castling rules are somewhat different: although the final positions of both short and long castling remain the same, there are times when a king may start on b1 and end up on g1, which will often upset the plans of an opponent who has forgotten that such long castling is permitted.

The first day's play in my match with Elizabeth ended with the score tied at 2-2; but on the second day, I won three games out of four, and the overall score ended at 5½-2½.

No. 43

E. Pähtz – A. Kosteniuk

Mainz 2006 (m/6)



1.d4

In Chess960, the development and coordination of the pieces are even more important than in normal chess.

1...d5 2.♘f3 ♘d6 3.♘d3 e6 4.g3 ♘e4 5.♗g2 f6 6.♘d2 ♗g6 7.♘f4 ♗f5

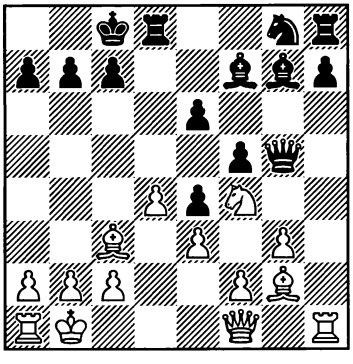
The opening stage is difficult to comment on, but today I would have played it a little differently: the bishop's development to g6 seems a bit artificial.

8.♘xe4 dxe4 9.e3 g5 10.♘e2 ♗g6 11.h4 f5 12.hxg5 ♕xg5 13.♘f4 ♗f7 14.♗c3 ♗g7

Black's pieces are not harmoniously placed. White could try playing

15.♘h5, or else break in the center with 15.f3.

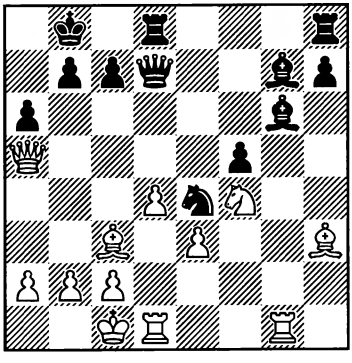
15.♕f1 0-0-0



16.♕b5 ♕e7 17.g4 a6 18.♕a5 ♕d7 19.gxf5 exf5 20.f3?!

White should not have opened up the e-file for the black pieces. Once again, 20.♘h5!? deserved consideration.

20...♘f6 21.fxe4 ♘xe4 22.♗h3 ♗g6 23.♖g1 ♔b8 24.0-0-0



24...♕f7

After some rather strange play in the opening, and castling in Fischer-chess style, we've practically reached a normal position.

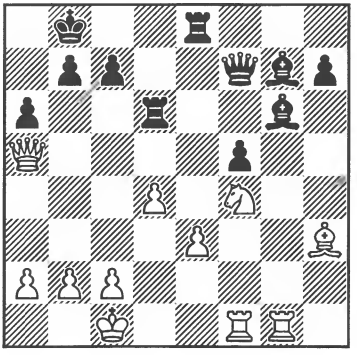
25.♖df1?!

25.♔b1 was better.

25...♖he8

25...♘xc3!? should be considered.

26.♗b4 ♘d6 27.♗xd6 ♖xd6



28.♕a3?

The queen makes a poor defender. After this inaccurate move, White's position immediately becomes very difficult. It was better to defend the e3-pawn by 28.♖g3, with about an even game.

28...♗f8! 29.b4 ♖b6 30.♕b3 ♕xb3

And the game enters a technical stage, which Black brought home convincingly enough.

31.axb3 ♖xe3 32.♖e1 ♖xe1+ 33.♖xe1 ♗h6 34.♖f1 ♖xb4 35.c3 ♖xb3 36.♔c2 ♖b6 37.♘d5 f4+ 38.♔d2 f3+ 39.♔e1 ♖b2 40.♖xf3 ♗e4 41.♖f6 ♗d2+

White resigned.

Before my next test in the Upper League of the men's national championship, which was to be held in 2006 in Tomsk, I took part in the famous blitz tournament for the prize offered by the *Vechernaya Moskva* newspaper. Here's what the *"Vecherka"* (the newspaper's nickname) wrote about the tournament the day before:

Tomorrow, in the Muzeon arts park, will be the start of the jubilee 60th Anniversary edition of the Moscow Blitz Championship for the Vechernaya Moskva *prize. Let's drop back into history for a bit. The first tournament took place in 1947, and was dedicated to the 800th anniversary of the founding of Moscow. The* Vecherka's *correspondent has managed to find, in our archives, a 60-year-old copy of our paper. "Tomorrow, July 7, 1947, in Gorky Park," it says in* Vecherka, *"will be the final of the championship of Moscow in lightning chess. 16 participants will vie for the championship of the capital. The tournament table is filled with the names of semifinal winners and those personally invited: grandmasters Vassily Smyslov, Alexander Kotov, and the Moscow champion, master Vladimir Simagin. The clocks are started; the games begin. As in the semifinals, 5 minutes are allotted for each game. After 4 rounds, Kotov is in the lead, with 4 victories. Smyslov and Simagin started badly, each losing in the very first round.... Now the first half of the tournament has ended. The leader is now master Yuri Averbakh; behind him – master Ilya Kan. Smyslov has improved his score considerably. There are still a few rounds to go. Averbakh delivers a spectacular mate to Kotov, and wins the deciding game against Smyslov. Yuri Averbakh (of 'Zenit') has achieved a record result - 13½ out of 15! Second place went to Ilya Kan (CDKA) – 11 points. And 3rd-4th places were shared by Kotov ('Zenit') and Smyslov ('Nauka') – with 9½."*

The winner of the *Vechernaya Moskva* competition usually gets a beautiful samovar *(a fancy Russian tea kettle – ed.)*. The most impressive collection of tournament winner's samovars was Mikhail Tal's 12! Evgeny Vasiukov has 6, David Bronstein got 5, Alexander Morozevich has 4, and Alexey Dreev has 2. Weather permitting, the tournaments are usually held out in the fresh air, and attract crowds of spectators.

After a third-round win against the famous grandmaster Evgeny Vasiukov, I found myself among the leaders.

No. 44 Caro-Kann Defense B12

A. Kosteniuk – E. Vasiukov

Moscow 2006 (blitz)

1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.e5 ♗f5 4.♘c3 e6 5.g4

In this game, I resolved to play something a little sharper. Blitz is generally a great arena for experimentation.

5...♗g6 6.♘ge2 f6 7.h4 fxe5 8.dxe5 c5 9.h5 ♗f7 10.♗g2

10.♘g3 ♗e7 11.♗g2 ♘c6 12.0-0 ♘h6 13.f4 g5 14.f5 ♘xe5 15.fxe6 ♗xe6 16.♘xd5 ♘hxg4 17.♘xe7 ♕xe7 18.♘e4 ♖d8 19.♗xg5 ♖xd1 20.♖axd1 ♖g8 21.♘d6+ ♕xd6 22.♖xd6 ♖xg5 23.♖xe6+ ♔d7 24.♖ef6 ♘xf6 25.♖xf6 ♖xh5 26.♗xb7 ♖g5+ 27.♔f1 ♖g6 28.♖f5 ♔e6 29.♗c8+ ♔d6 30.♖f2 h5 31.♗f5 ♖f6 32.♔e2 ♘c6 33.c3 ♔e5 34.♗d7 ♖xf2+ 35.♔xf2, draw, was Shirov-Epishin, Dordrecht 1999.

10...♘c6 11.f4

Quite in the spirit of this variation, where the pawns often run out ahead of the pieces.

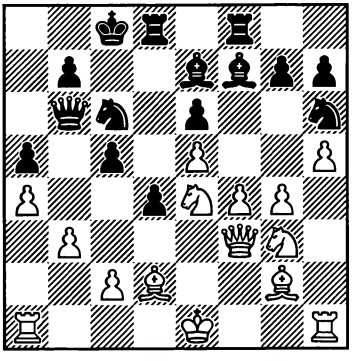
11...♘h6 12.♘g3 d4 13.♘ce4 ♕b6 14.b3 0-0-0 15.♗d2 ♗e7 16.a4

Of course, it's not possible to give a serious assessment of moves played in blitz games. But here, I clearly forgot about a basic principle of opening play, namely: getting your pieces out.

16...a5

White would have faced more serious problems after 16...d3!?.

17.♕f3 ♖hf8



18.♘d6+!?

The final seconds of an exciting blitz game

Blitz can be played very aggressively, because piece activity is one of the most important factors for success in blitz chess.

18...♗xd6 19.exd6 ♖xd6 20.♘e4 ♖dd8 21.0-0 ♔b8 22.♔h1 ♔a8 23.♖ae1

For the sacrificed pawn, White has compensation in the form of the strong light-squared bishop.

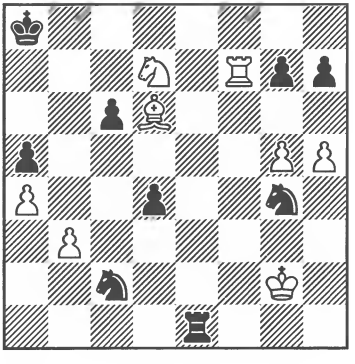
23...♗g8 24.♘g5 e5 25.♕g3 exf4 26.♗xf4 ♖de8? 27.♗d6

White would be almost winning after 27.♗c7! ♕b4 28.♖xf8 ♖xf8 29.♗d6 ♖c8 30.♘e4, as Black would be unable to defend the c5-pawn.

27...♖xf1+ 28.♖xf1 ♘b4 29.♘e4 ♗d5 30.♘xc5 ♗xg2+ 31.♕xg2 ♕c6 32.♕xc6 bxc6 33.g5 ♘g4 34.♖f7

Continuing to play for mate, but in the endgame White could also think about pawn weaknesses, such as by 34.♖f4!?.

34...♘xc2 35.♘d7 ♖e1+ 36.♔g2



36...♔b7??

36...♘ce3+ 37.♔g3 ♖g1+ 38.♔h3 ♖h1+ 39.♔g3 ♖g1+ would have been a perpetual check, but now we were down to our last few seconds.

37.♘e5+ ♔c8 38.♘xg4 d3 39.♗f4 d2 40.♗xd2 ♖e2+ 41.♖f2

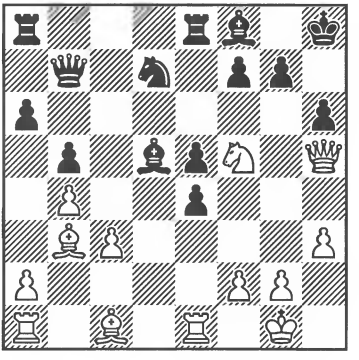
And after a few more adventures, White won on move 67.

The Upper League of the Russian Men's Championship at Tomsk was to be one of the worst tournaments of my entire career. My losing streak began in the second round, after I overlooked a pretty drawing combination.

No. 45

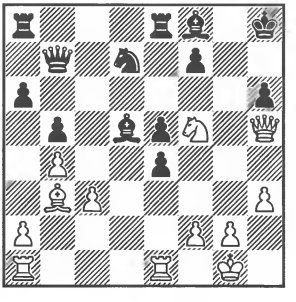
A. Kosteniuk – E. Inarkiev

Tomsk 2006



26.♕h4?

By this point, I had already used up almost two hours; but despite spending almost all my remaining time, I could not find the strongest continuation, 26.♗xh6 gxh6:

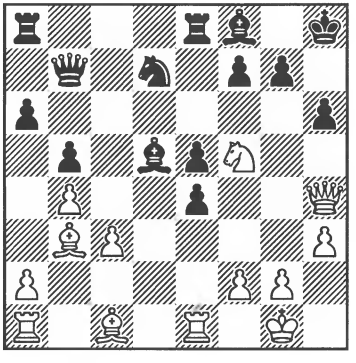


27.♘d6!. This was the move I overlooked; the line I considered,

27.♘xh6 ♘f6 28.♕h4 ♗xh6, led nowhere.

27...♗xd6. After other continuations, Black is even a little worse: 27...♘f6 28.♘xb7 ♘xh5 29.♗xd5 with a slight advantage to White; 27...♕c6 28.♗xd5 ♕xd5 (28...♕xd6 29.♕xf7 ♘f6 30.♗xa8 ♖xa8 31.a4, with a little better position for White) 29.♘xf7+ ♔g8 (29...♔g7 30.♘xh6 with an attack; 29...♔h7? 30.♖ad1 ♕c6 31.♖d6! and White wins) 30.♕g6+ ♗g7 31.♘xh6+ ♔f8 32.♘f5 ♕f7 33.♕xf7+ ♔xf7 34.♘d6+ ♔e6 35.♘xe8 ♖xe8 36.a4, with the better ending.

28.♕xh6+ ♔g8 29.♖e3 ♘f8 30.♖g3+ ♘g6 31.♖xg6+ fxg6 32.♕xg6+ ♔h8 33.♕h6+ ♕h7 34.♕f6+ ♕g7 35.♕h4+ ♕h7 36.♕f6+ with perpetual check.



26...♖e6 27.♗c2

I should have accepted the slightly inferior endgame after 27.♗xd5 ♕xd5 28.♕xe4.

27...♖c8 28.♗d2 ♘b6 29.♖ad1 ♘c4 30.♗c1 ♖f6 (30...♘d6 was better) **31.♘xh6 ♖xh6 32.♗xh6 gxh6 33.♕h5?**

Again, I should have taken on e4: 33.♗xe4 ♗xe4 34.♖xe4.

33...♗g7 34.a4 ♖f8 35.axb5 axb5 36.f3 f5

36...exf3 was more exact, but both players were now in very deep time pressure.

37.fxe4 fxe4 38.♔h2

38.♕g6 would have held out longer.

38...e3 39.♖f1 ♖xf1 40.♖xf1 e4 41.♕e8+

The time scramble is over, and Black confidently brings home the point.

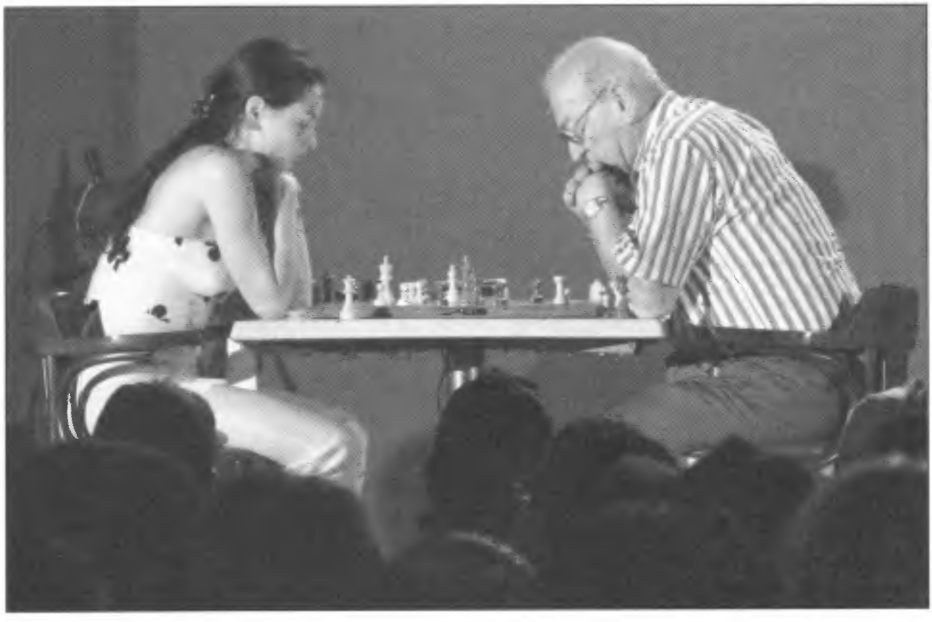
41...♗g8 42.♗d1 ♕c7+ 43.♔h1 ♕g3 44.♕h5 ♘d2 45.♖g1 ♗c4 46.♕e8+ ♔h7 47.♕d7 ♕f4 48.♗g4 ♘f1

White resigned.

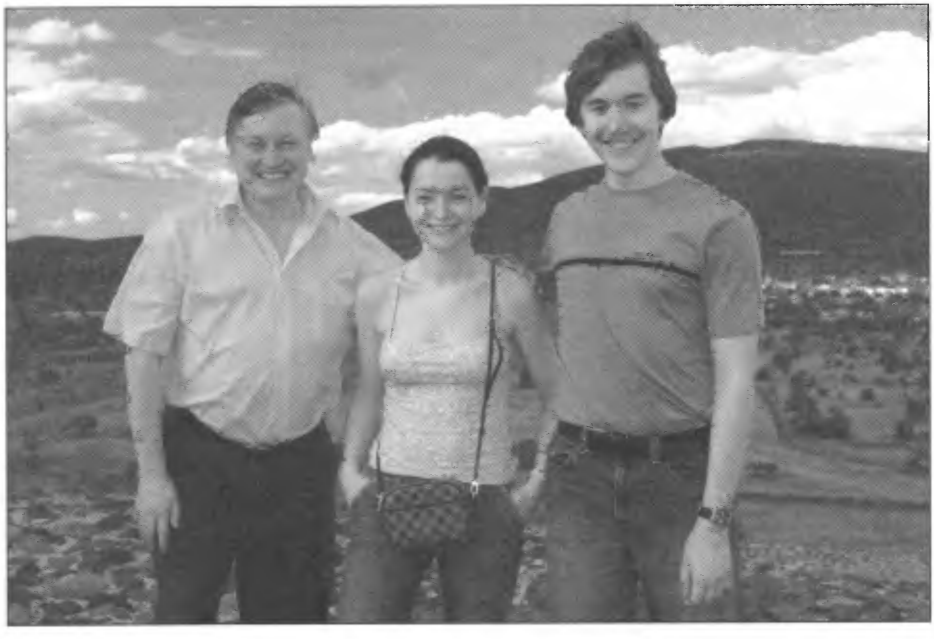
In chess as so frequently in life – after a dark time comes the light. After Tomsk, I immediately flew to Mexico, where I did very well in a rapid-chess tournament, sharing second and third places with Korchnoi, and defeating him in our personal two-game match.

This is exactly why we should not let ourselves get too downhearted after bad performances and give up: better we should make an effort to understand our errors, and work on them carefully, before the next tournament. We also should not forget that such dark times may stretch out for several events in a row; but that in any case, we need to keep working, while believing that we shall eventually succeed.

After Mexico, I returned to Europe for the Cap d'Agde tournament, and got right off the plane into the playing hall. The tournaments in this French resort town appear to have been organized according to the motto: *"Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité."* In order to get your lunch and dinner, you must stand in an enormous line at the restaurant, and then get to the buffet table. But even this atmosphere of equality is not as terrifying as the



A hard-fought battle with Viktor Korchnoi, Mexico 2006



On excursion to the Teotihuacán pyramids with Anatoly Karpov and Sergey Karjakin

indifference of the organizers – either their unwillingness or their inability to put themselves in the position of the players and to help them with anything.

Let me give you just one example. In 2008, after the tournament, we were driven to the train station; but instead of taking three women (Almira Skripchenko, my mother, and me) with our two little children and huge pile of suitcases straight to the platform, we were dropped off far from the station entrance, and it was only by a miracle that we managed to catch our train.

The field for these rapid-chess tournaments is, of course, very attractive; but having played there twice, in 2006 and 2008, I have come to the firm decision never to go there again. Apparently due to the particular level of organization and the poor-quality living conditions, I did poorly both times in Cap d'Agde.

In 2006, I missed a win against a young Indian talent, and ended up even losing.

No. 46 Ruy López C89
P. Negi – A. Kosteniuk
Cap d'Agde 2006

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 a6 4.♗a4 ♘f6 5.0-0 ♗e7 6.♖e1 b5 7.♗b3 0-0 8.c3 d5!?

Marshall's famous attack, first played in the well-known game Capablanca-Marshall, New York 1918. Black sacrifices a pawn for development and open lines for his two bishops. The move ...d7- (or ...d6-)d5 is often Black's main idea in the Ruy López. Today, Black strives for this freeing break in almost all lines of the Ruy.

9.exd5 ♘xd5 10.♘xe5 ♘xe5 11.♖xe5 c6 12.d4 ♗d6 13.♖e1 ♕h4 14.g3 ♕h3 15.♖e4 g5 16.♕f1 ♕h5

One of the mainline positions of the contemporary Marshall Attack.

17.♘d2 f5 18.♗d1 ♕h6!?

An improvement on the game Motylev-Beliavsky, Wijk aan Zee 2006: 18...g4 19.♖e1 f4 20.♘e4 ♗c7 21.♗b3 ♔h8 22.gxf4 ♘xf4 23.♗xf4 ♗xf4 24.♕g2 ♖a7 25.♖e2 ♖e7 26.♘g3 ♕g5 27.♖xe7 ♕xe7 28.♕xc6 h5 29.♕g6 h4 30.♕h5+ ♕h7 31.♕xh7+ ♔xh7 32.♘e4 ♔g6 33.♘c5 ♖e8 34.♗c2+ ♔g5 35.♗d3 ♗f5 36.♗f1 g3 37.hxg3 hxg3 38.♗d3, and the game was drawn.

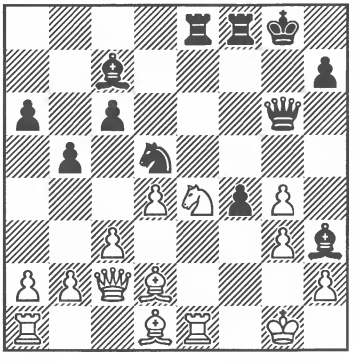
19.♖e1 f4 20.♘e4 ♗c7 21.f3?!

An unnecessary weakening. After our game, White started playing 21.♗d2!?.

21...♗h3 22.♕f2 g4 23.fxg4 ♕g6 24.♕c2

White's defense is not easy at all. For example, 24.gxf4 ♗xf4 25.♕e2 ♖ae8 26.♗c2 ♗xg4 27.♕g2 ♔h8, and Black's bishops rip open the enemy king's cover and decide the game.

24...♖ae8 25.♗d2



25...♘e3! 26.♗xe3 fxe3?

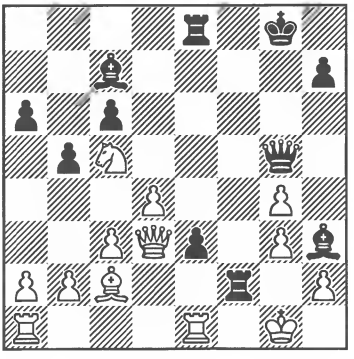
Simply 26...♖xe4! 27.♕d3 fxg3! wins.

27.♘c5 ♕h6 28.♘e4 ♕g6 29.♘c5 ♕g5?!

The most logical continuation would have been to take the draw by 29...♕h6, but even now, I thought I had a very dangerous attack.

30.♕d3 ♖f2? 31.♗c2?

A mistake. 31.♘e4 ♕g6 32.♕xe3 was stronger, when Black doesn't have enough compensation for the three pawns: 32...♖ff8 33.♗f3.



31...♖e7?

Black could set problems by 31... ♕h6 32.g5 ♕h5, when White has to give back some material: 33.♕xh7+ (33.♖xe3 ♖g2+ 34.♔h1 ♖xe3) 33... ♕xh7 34.♗xh7+ ♔xh7, and Black has a decisive advantage.

32.♘e4

Now White repels the attack and keeps his extra material. Soon I was lost.

32...♖g2+ 33.♔h1 ♕g6 34.♖xe3 ♔g7 35.♖ae1 ♖f7 36.♘g5 ♖xc2 37.♕xg6+ hxg6 38.♘xf7 ♔xf7 39.♖e7+ ♔f6 40.♖xc7 ♗g2+ 41.♔g1 ♗d5 42.h4 ♖g2+ 43.♔f1 ♖xg3 44.g5+ ♔f5 45.♔f2 ♖g2+ 46.♔e3 ♖xb2 47.♖f1+ ♔g4 48.♖g1+ ♔f5 49.♖e7

And since I could not avoid the exchange of rooks (49...♖g2 50.♖xg2 ♗xg2 51.♖e5+ ♔g4 52.h5!), I resigned.

In November, I competed in a blitz tournament in Moscow, which turned out to be my last event before the break for my pregnancy and the birth of my daughter. Here is one of my wins.

No. 47 Ruy López C88

E. Sutovsky – A. Kosteniuk

Moscow 2006 (blitz)

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 a6 4.♗a4 ♘f6 5.0-0 ♗e7 6.♖e1 b5 7.♗b3 0-0 8.h3

One of many ways to avoid the Marshall Attack.

8...♗b7 9.d3 ♖e8 10.a3 h6 11.♘bd2 ♗f8

An alternative is 11...♗c5.

12.♘f1 d5

Of course, the classic Ruy setups with ...d7-d6 are also playable.

13.exd5 ♘xd5 14.♘g3 ♕d7

14...♘d4! was worth considering.

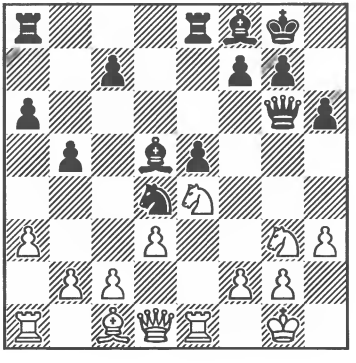
15.♘h5 ♕d6

Not overlooking the ♗xh6 shot.

16.♘d2?!

After this move, Black seizes the initiative.

16...♘d4 17.♘e4 ♕g6 18.♗xd5 ♗xd5 19.♘hg3



19...♖ad8

19...f5 immediately was worth considering, since she who holds the initiative must attack.

20.♗e3 ♗b7

Again, 20...f5 would have been interesting.

21.♗xd4 ♖xd4 22.♕g4 ♕xg4

Thus, we have reached an endgame where the age-old question must be resolved: which is stronger, the knight or the bishop? Keep in mind, however, that in blitz games, the knight is far more dangerous than the bishop.

23.hxg4 c5 24.♘f5 ♖dd8 25.♖ad1 ♖e6

25...c4!?, trying to open up the game for the bishops, wasn't a bad idea.

26.f3 g6 27.♘e3 ♔g7 28.c4 ♗e7 29.♔f2 ♖b6 30.♖e2 ♖f8 31.♘g3 ♖d8 32.♘e4 ♗c6 33.♖c2? b4! 34.axb4 ♗a4 35.bxc5 ♗xc2 36.cxb6 ♗xd1 37.♘xd1 f5 38.gxf5 gxf5 39.♘g3 ♗c5+ 40.♔e2 ♔f6

40...♔g6 was more accurate, avoiding the possible fork from d5.

41.♘c3 ♔e6

41...♖g8 was worth considering.

42.♘a4 ♗d4 43.b4 ♖g8 44.♘h5 ♖xg2+ 45.♔d1 ♖g1+ 46.♔c2 ♖g8?!

Unnecessary retreating moves frequently turn out to be a loss of valuable time. Of course, passed pawns and knights are very dangerous with limited time to think, but Black should have played more exactly with 46...♗xb6 47.♘xb6 ♖g5.

47.c5 ♖c8 48.♘g7+ ♔d7 49.♘xf5 h5 50.♔b3 ♖f8 51.♘h4 ♔c6

51...♖f4 was more precise.

52.♘g6 ♖f7

It's always difficult to comment on the finish of a blitz game, when the players are down to their final seconds. So I advise you just to watch, as I somehow make good on my material advantage.

53.♔c4 ♖g7 54.♘h4 ♗f2 55.♘f5 ♖d7 56.♘d6 h4 57.b7 ♖xb7! 58.♘xb7 ♔xb7

White resigned.

After the Tal Memorial blitz in November, I attended training seminars in the Moscow suburbs, and would have gone to the Superfinal of the Russian Championship in Gorodets, except that a sudden complication in what had heretofore been an uneventful pregnancy forced me to choose something other than chess. So I took a break from tournaments for nearly a year. Of course, I continued to follow chess life: I observed games, read chess books and magazines, tried my hand at being a chess commentator, and from time to time played online chess.

I began playing chess regularly over the Internet starting in 1999. For a few years, I even gave my students chess lessons over the Internet. Nowadays, I don't have the time to give individual lessons; instead, I have created some websites – www.chessmovies.com, www.tubechess.com, www.chesskillertips.com – and opened several channels on YouTube – www.youtube.com/chessqueen and www.youtube.com/chessqueentv, where I regularly present my annotated games and interesting and instructive problems, which could help you learn to play better chess.

Of course, Internet play cannot replace "live" games of chess; but sometimes they are the only way to get any training. I would recommend to

young players that they play no more than ten blitz games per day, and absolutely analyze every game they play. I never start a new blitz session until I have analyzed the games I played the day before. Internet play can provide useful sparring, but only if it doesn't take up all your time.

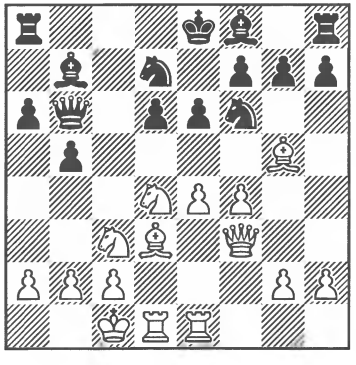
In recent years, many blitz tournaments have been held through the Internet. At the end of 2006, after I had stopped playing in serious events, I competed in one of them, organized by the ACP.

No. 48 Sicilian Defense B96

A. Kosteniuk – K. Sasikiran

Internet 2006

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 a6 6.♗g5 e6 7.f4 ♘bd7 8.♕f3 ♕c7 9.0-0-0 b5 10.♗d3 ♗b7 11.♖he1 ♕b6



12.♘b3

The best-known line here is the sharp 12.♘d5!?, first played in Chiburdanidze-Dvoirys, USSR 1980. But in blitz, I usually try not to play the "Who remembers their opening analysis better?" game.

12...♗e7 13.♔b1 0-0-0

The expert on this variation preferred not to castle, instead playing 13...b4 here. For example: 14.♘e2 h6 15.♗h4 ♖c8 16.♗f2 ♕c7 17.♖c1 d5 18.♘g3 dxe4 19.♘xe4 0-0 20.g3 a5 21.♗d4 a4 22.♘bd2 ♖fd8 23.♕e2 a3 24.b3 ♘xe4 25.♘xe4 ♗xe4 26.♕xe4 ♘f6 27.♗xf6 ♗xf6 28.c4 bxc3 29.♕h7+ ♔f8 30.♗c2 ♔e7 31.f5 ♖h8 32.♖xe6+ fxe6 33.♕g6 e5 34.b4 ♕c4 35.♗b3 c2+, and White resigned in Visser-Dvoirys, Leeuwarden 1995.

14.♕h3 h6 15.♗xf6 ♗xf6 16.e5!?

A typical shot in these kinds of positions. With this pawn sacrifice, White tries to whip up an attack against the black king.

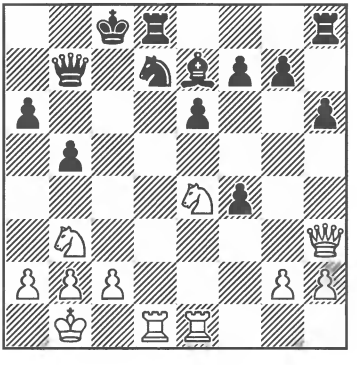
16...dxe5 17.♗e4

17.f5!? was worth considering.

17...exf4 18.♗xb7+ ♕xb7

18...♔xb7 was better, leaving d6 under the watchful eye of Black's queen.

19.♘e4 ♗e7



20.♖d6!

Even in a serious game, such a move can throw an opponent into confusion; in blitz, Black went completely crazy and lost immediately.

20...♔b8? 21.♘a5 ♕a7?? 22.♘c6+ Black resigned.

Chapter 9
Return

In April 2007, our own miracle appeared for my husband and me, our happiness and joy – our tiny daughter, Francesca. From November 2006 through July 2007, I dedicated myself totally to the birth of this little miracle. When after a rough beginning (Francesca was born 2½ months premature, weighing only 3.3 pounds), we were finally able to take Francesca home from the hospital, and I assured myself that my little one was all right, I once again felt the urge to return to chess.

To be quite honest, I did not think that after my daughter's birth I would have such a strong desire to play chess again. I understood that I still had the ambition, the strength, and the desire to play and work. At that juncture, Diego supported my decision to return to chess, and was very helpful, telling me that, if I wanted to do something, there was no reason not to. For this I am very grateful. The life of a chess professional is very difficult: constantly traveling from place to place; competing in tournaments; blunders and defeats. It's good to be able to choose your events and work with the best trainers in the world; but most chess professionals must concern themselves solely with making a living and their next tournament. Of course, I was lucky in that regard – that although chess is officially my profession, I am not obliged to earn my living at it.

In October 2007, I competed in a rapid-chess match-tournament in the French town of Villandry. The tournament took place in the Château de Villandry, one of the castles on the Loire river. The interior furnishings of the château have been dated to the 18th century. This was a festival of chess and music: after our tense battles over the chessboard, we could listen to sonatas written by Philidor, performed by the talented pianist, Natalia Kudritskaya. The tournament itself consisted of only four players: myself, Almira Skripchenko, Laurent Fressinet, and Viktor Korchnoi. The luck of the draw paired me once again with Elia in the first round, while Fressinet played Korchnoi. In the final, I played Laurent; and in the second game, where I had to win, we set a real record for game length: it lasted 237 moves! After winning this exhausting game, I still lost to Laurent in the blitz.

My first tournament at a classic time control since the birth of Francesca was the European Team Championship in Crete, which took place at the end of October and the beginning of November. Returning to tournament play was very difficult, both physically and mentally. I found myself not only tiring more quickly – I also missed my daughter terribly. At the tournament in Crete, my excellent performance on top board gave me a little boost. When the team leader shows a good result, then her team usually

First simul after returning to chess. Austria, September 2007

plays well too. In Crete, the Russian women's team took the gold for the first time in the history of this event. I used up my last reserves of strength for this tournament in the following encounter from the next-to-last round with Peng,

who had had nearly a perfect score up to that point.

No. 49 French Defense C11

A. Kosteniuk – Peng Zhaoqin

Heraklion 2007

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.♗g5 dxe4 5.♘xe4 ♘bd7 6.♘xf6+ ♘xf6 7.♗d3 h6 8.♗h4 ♗d7

Peng played a very interesting opening. The game Morozevich-Zvjaginsev, Moscow 2005, continued as follows: 8...c5 9.dxc5 ♕a5+ 10.c3 ♕xc5 11.♘f3 ♗e7 12.♕e2 0-0 13.0-0-0 ♗d7 14.♘e5 ♗a4 15.♖d2 a6 16.♖e1, and after a complex battle the players agreed to a draw on move 52.

9.♘f3 c5

9...♗c6 10.0-0 ♗xf3 11.♕xf3 c6 12.c3 ♗e7 13.♖ae1 ♕d5 14.♕h3 g5 15.♖e5 ♕xa2 16.♗xg5 0-0-0 17.♗c1 ♗d6 18.♖e2 ♕d5 19.f4 h5 20.♕f3 c5 21.f5 cxd4 22.fxe6 fxe6 23.♕xf6 ♖hf8 24.♕xe6+ ♕xe6 25.♖xe6 dxc3 26.♖xf8 ♗xf8 27.♗f5, and Black resigned in Ivanchuk-Vaganian, Horgen 1995.

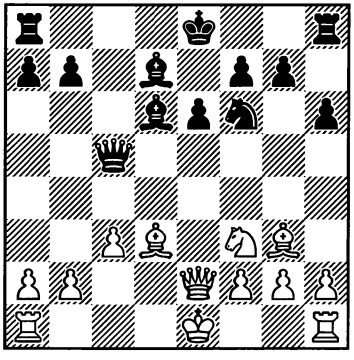
10.dxc5

10.0-0 is also interesting.

10...♕a5+ 11.c3 ♕xc5 12.♕e2 ♗d6

Black is not in a hurry to castle. She leaves herself the option of taking her king to either side, and invites White to commit first.

13.♗g3



13...♗xg3

After this move, White's position begins to appeal to me more and more: the h-file is now open, and I have a plan to transfer my rook to the center and advance my kingside pawns. During the game, I spent the most time studying 13... ♘d5, in order to take on g3 only if White castles kingside. Possible continuations: 14.0-0-0 ♘xc3 (14...0-0 15.♗xd6 ♕xd6 16.♖he1 with a complex game; 14... ♘f4?! 15.♕d2 and Black has to retreat) 15.bxc3 ♕xc3+ 16.♕c2 ♕a3+ 17.♕b2 ♖c8+ 18.♔b1; or 14.♘e5 ♘xc3 15.♕h5 0-0 16.♖c1 ♗xe5 17.♗xe5 f6 – with mutual chances in both cases.

14.hxg3 ♗c6 15.♖h4 a6?!

15...♖d8 was better.

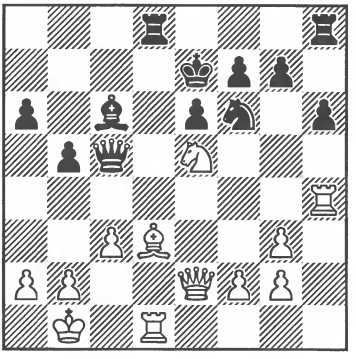
16.0-0-0 b5 17.♔b1

Unnecessary prophylaxis. Now Black has ideas like ...♖d8-d3, ...♗e4, and – as we shall see later on – moving the bishop to a2 with check. 17.♖d4 was stronger, occupying the d-file and pushing Black to decide where to castle. For example: 17...0-0 18.♘e5 ♗d5 19.♔b1, followed by advancing the f- and g-pawns.

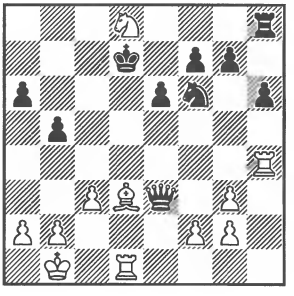
17...♖d8 18.♘e5 ♔e7?!

During the game, I had the feeling that Peng didn't want to castle, so as not to give me a chance to attack her king. Even though in similar systems Black's king frequently feels comfortable enough on e7, this position looks to me like one where Black should have castled – 18...0-0, now asking White to declare her intentions, since advancing her kingside pawns no longer works. For example, on 19.g4 (19.c4!?), Black replies with 19...♗e4.

Here I spent 20 minutes calculating an interesting queen sacrifice:

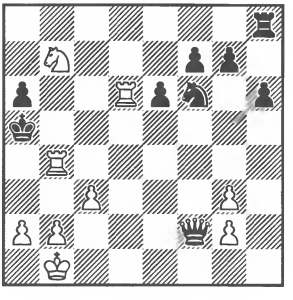


19.♕e3!? ♕xe3 20.♘xc6+ ♔d7 (20... ♔d6? is bad, in view of 21.♘xd8 ♕xf2 22.♘xf7+ ♔c7 23.♘xh8) 21.♘xd8:



1) Fiery complications erupt after 21...♕xf2 22.♗xb5+ ♔c7 23.♖c4+:

1a) 23...♔b6? 24.♖d6+ ♔xb5 25.♖b4+ ♔a5 26.♘b7#:

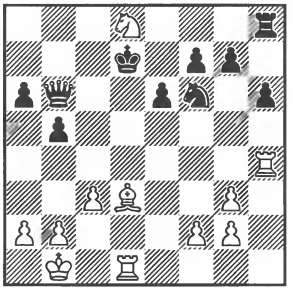


Oh, how I wish that this variation had been forced!

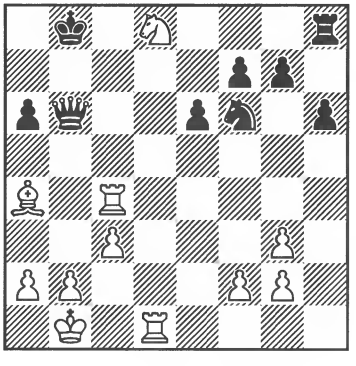
1b) 23...♔b8 24.♗xa6 ♕f5+ (24... ♖xd8 25.♖xd8+ ♔a7 26.♖a4) 25.♔a1

♖xd8 26.♖xd8+ ♔a7 27.♖c7+ ♔b6 (27...♔xa6 28.♖d6+ ♔b5 [28...♔a5 29.b4+] 29.c4+ ♔a4 30.♖a6+ ♔b4 31.♖b6+, winning) 28.♗d3 ♕h5 29.♖cc8 ♕h1+ 30.♗b1 ♘d5 31.♖d7, and White has great chances to deliver mate – if she doesn't get mated first herself.

2) 21...♕b6:



22.♗xb5+ (22.♘xf7 ♖f8 23.♖d4+ with an unclear game) 22...♔c7 (22...♔e7 23.♘c6+ ♔f8 24.♖d8+ ♘e8 25.♗a4 g5 26.♖hd4 ♔g7 27.♘e5 ♘f6 28.♖xh8 ♔xh8 29.♘xf7+ ♔g7 30.♘e5 with compensation for the queen) 23.♖c4+ ♔b8. I did not think it was possible for me to evaluate either this position or the position from the 21...♕f2 variation. The line might continue 24.♗a4 (24.♘c6+ ♔a8 [24...♔b7 25.♗a4 ♕xf2 26.♘e7] 25.♗a4, with compensation):



2a) 24...♕xf2 25.♖b4+ ♔c7 26.♖c4+ (26.♖b7+ ♔c8 27.♗d7+ ♘xd7 28.♖dxd7 ♕f1+ 29.♔c2 ♕xg2+ 30.♔b3 ♕xb7+ 31.♖xb7 ♖xd8 32.♖xf7 ♖d7) 26...♔b8, and White could give a perpetual;

2b) 24...♖xd8 25.♖b4 ♖xd1+ 26.♗xd1 ♕xb4 27.cxb4 ♘e4, with an approximately equal ending.

And although my desire to finish the game with a queen sacrifice was great, I remembered that I was playing for a team, and with a heavy heart played instead

19.f4 ♖d6 20.f5

20.g4 could be met by 20...♖hd8 21.g5 hxg5 22.fxg5 ♘d7 23.♘xc6+ ♕xc6 24.♖f1 ♘e5, with roughly equal play.

20...♖hd8 21.♖d4 ♗e8 22.♘f3

22.fxe6 would lead back to the game.

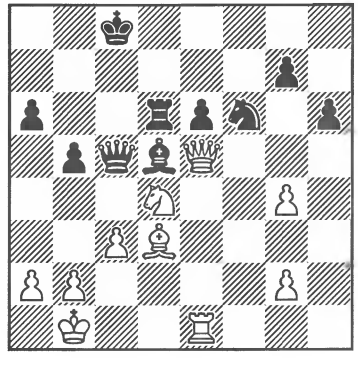
22...♗c6 23.♘e5 ♗e8 24.fxe6 fxe6 25.♖xd6 ♖xd6 26.♖e1 ♗c6 27.♘f3 ♗d5

My silicon friend shows the following possibility for Black: 27...♗xf3 28.gxf3 ♘h5 29.f4 ♘xg3 30.♕g4 ♕f2, indicating that this line must end in a perpetual. Of course, a human would find it hard to choose such a line, especially when time is running short.

28.♘d4

In this game, Black always faced a dilemma: where should the king go? Peng's heart just wasn't into putting her king on the kingside.

28...♔d8 (28...♔f8 was better, in any case) **29.g4 ♔c8 30.♕e5**



30...♖d7?

Time pressure was approaching. Black had to continue passive resistance by 30...♔b7. Of course, White would find it far easier to play this position, having the initiative plus a fairly well laid-out plan. For example, there is 31.♔a1, with the idea of playing g4-g5 at some point, although it would not work right away in view of 31...hxg5 32.♕xg5 ♗xa2+. With an ending coming up, I would not have wanted to move my king so far away; but putting it under the piercing gaze of the enemy queen was unsettling, though playable: 31.♔c1 b4 32.c4 ♘d7 33.♘b3 ♕c7 34.♕e2, with a complex game.

31.g5!

Black hoped that White would play the immediate 31.♘xe6 ♗xa2+ 32.♔xa2 ♕xe5 33.♖xe5 ♖xd3, when the ending would have been about equal.

31...hxg5 32.♘xe6 ♕d6

And now, on 32...♗xa2+ 33.♔xa2 ♕xe5 34.♖xe5 ♖xd3, there follows 35.♖xg5, and Black loses the pawn on g7.

33.♘d4 ♕xe5 34.♖xe5 ♔c7 35.♖xg5 ♔b6

The game has entered the cashing-in stage, but I wanted to get to the time control and into the ending without needless adventures.

36.♔c2 b4

After 36...♗xa2 37.b3 b4 38.♗f5, Black's bishop might never come back.

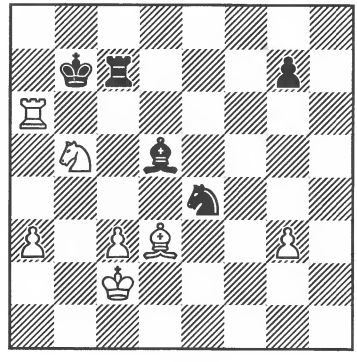
37.a4 bxa3 38.bxa3 ♖c7 39.g3 ♘e4?

This move makes White's road to victory a lot shorter.

40.♖g6+ ♔a7 41.♖xa6+ ♔b7 42.♘b5!

Defending and attacking simultaneously. The time scramble is over, the smoke clears, and White is left with two extra pawns. Before the game, Yuri Razuvaev told me an interesting story about Botvinnik. Mikhail Moiseevich was conducting a session of his legendary school, sternly asking the intimidated students: "How did Capablanca convert his extra pawn? Well?" Silence reigned, and he continued, "Capablanca waited until his opponent blundered away another pawn!"

"And that is how you ought to play today's game," said Yuri, and time showed the correctness of my trainer's words.

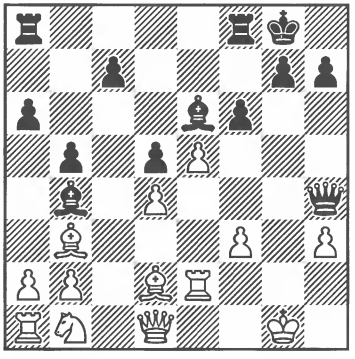


42...♖c5 43.♘d6+ ♘xd6 44.♖xd6 ♗c6 45.♖g6 ♗a4+ 46.♔d2 ♖c7 47.c4 ♖e7 48.♔c3 ♗e8 49.♖g5 ♔c6 50.a4 ♔d6 51.a5 ♗c6 52.♖g6+ ♔c5 53.♖g5+ ♔d6 54.♔d4 ♖d7 55.♖g6+ ♔c7+ 56.♔c5 ♗f3 57.♗f5 ♖e7 58.♖e6. Black resigned.

The last round started early in the morning, and I was simply unable to replenish my energies after the tense game against Peng. In the game against Lahno, I had enough strength for the first 17 moves. I sacrificed a piece;

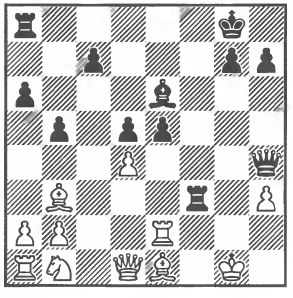
and in the following position, I had an interesting opportunity to sacrifice a second one:

No. 50
K. Lahno – A. Kosteniuk
Heraklion 2007

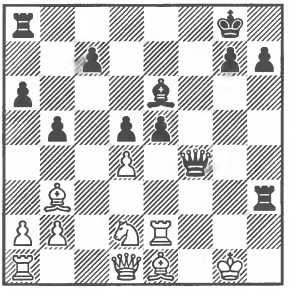


17...♕xd4+

17...fxe5! 18.♗xb4 ♖xf3 19.♗e1 would have been very strong:



19...♕f4! (A curious regrouping, which I did not see during the game. I only looked at 19...♕xh3 20.♘d2 ♕g4+ [20...♖f4] 21.♖g2, when Black has insufficient compensation for her two pieces.) 20.♘d2 (20.♗d2 ♕xd4+; 20.♖f2 ♖g3+ 21.♖g2 ♕e3+ 22.♗f2 ♖xg2+ 23.♔xg2 ♗xh3+ 24.♔h2 ♕xf2+ 25.♔xh3 c6, and the two extra pieces are helpless) 20...♖xh3:



21.♘f1 (already White has to defend: 21.♖f2 ♕h6, or 21.♖g2 ♕e3+ 22.♗f2 ♕h6 23.♔f1 ♖f8 would lose for her) 21...♖f8 22.♘g3 (22.♖f2 ♕g5+ 23.♖g2 ♖h1+! 24.♔xh1 ♖xf1+ 25.♔h2 ♕h6+ 26.♕h5 ♕xh5+ 27.♔g3 ♕h3#) 22...♖xg3+ 23.♗xg3 ♕xg3+ 24.♔h1 (24.♖g2 ♕e3+ 25.♔h1 ♖f3 26.♕g1 ♕e4) 24...♕h4+ 25.♔g1 ♖f3 26.♕d2 exd4 27.♕e1 ♖g3+ 28.♖g2 ♖xg2+ 29.♔xg2 ♕h3+ 30.♔g1 ♕g4+ 31.♔f1 ♕h3+. Black always has a perpetual, but she might also try to play on by 31...c5.

18.♗e3?!

18.♔h1 was better.

18...♕xe5?

The only explanation for this move is exhaustion. Going into the ending was the best and safest way to continue the game: 18...♕xd1+ 19.♗xd1 fxe5 20.♘d2 ♗xh3, and it's already White who must think about equalizing.

19.♘c3 ♖ad8

19...c6!?, supporting my pawns, was stronger. For example: 20.♕d4 (20.f4 ♕h5 21.♖h2 ♕h4, with about an even game) 20...♕g3+ 21.♖g2 ♕xf3 22.♗h6 ♖f7. The sharper 22...♗xh3 was also possible: 23.♖xg7+ ♔h8 24.♕xb4 ♖g8 25.♕e7 ♖ae8 26.♕f7 ♗e6 (26...♖ef8? 27.♖e1!) 27.♗d1 ♗xf7 28.♗xf3 ♖xg7+ 29.♗xg7+ ♔xg7.

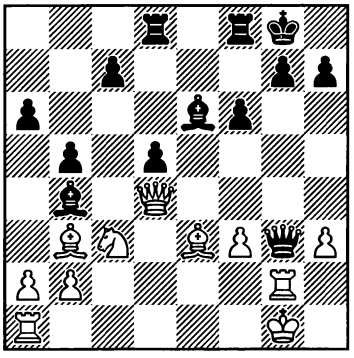
23.♖f1 ♗xc3 24.bxc3 ♕xh3 25.♗xg7 ♖xg7 26.♖xg7+ ♔xg7 27.♕xf6+ ♔g8

28.♕g5+ ♔h8 29.♕f6+ ♔g8, with a draw by perpetual check.

20.♕d4 ♕g3+

After 20...c5, White wins the pawn on e5 by 21.♕xe5 fxe5 22.♗g5.

21.♖g2



21...♕d6?

The decisive error. Black still had chances to draw with 21...♕xf3 22.♗h6 ♗a5! 23.♖xg7+ ♔h8 24.♗c2 ♗b6 25.♖xh7+ ♔g8.

22.♖d1?!

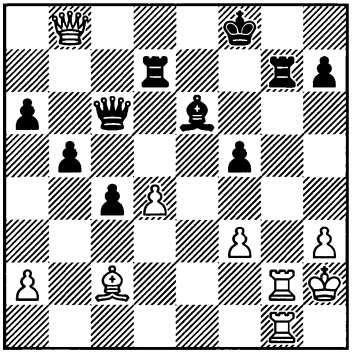
22.♘xd5 ♗xd5 23.♗xd5+ ♕xd5 24.♕xb4 was stronger.

22...c5

The last chance for Black to shore up the center was 22...c6!.

23.♕h4 ♗xc3 (23...d4 would have been met by 24.♕g4!)

24.bxc3 ♖d7 25.♗c2 f5 26.♗f4 ♕c6 27.♗e5 ♖ff7 28.♕h6 d4 29.cxd4 ♕d5 30.♕f4 c4 31.♔h2 ♔f8 32.♖dg1 ♕c6 33.♗xg7+ ♖xg7 34.♕b8+



Black resigned.

The "Knockout" team: Ekaterina Korbut, Ekaterina Kovalevskaya, Tatiana Kosintseva, Alexandra Kosteniuk, Nadezhda Kosintseva

Despite this loss, our team was able to draw the match and win the European Team Championship. I took the bronze medal on first board. Gold and silver on first board went to Peng and Danielian, both of whom I had defeated. Here was the lineup of our gold-medal team: Alexandra Kosteniuk, Tatiana Kosintseva, Nadezhda Kosintseva, Ekaterina Kovalevskaya and Ekaterina Korbut. It's interesting that the last names of all the members of the Russian team began with the letters "Ko" – the abbreviation for "knockout." And in fact, we certainly did have a "knockout" team!

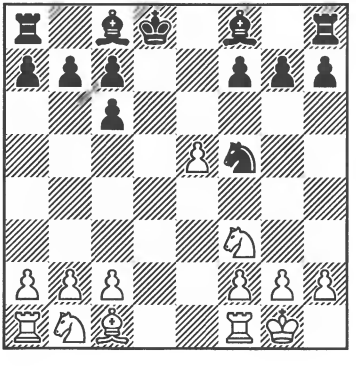
After a successful performance in Crete, I took part in the next Tal Memorial Blitz, where again I won some interesting games and matches. For example, winning the Berlin Endgame against a great specialist in this line like Zoltan Almasi, meant a great deal to me.

No. 51 Ruy López C67

A. Kosteniuk – Z. Almasi

Moscow 2007 (blitz)

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♘f6 4.0-0 ♘xe4 5.d4 ♘d6 6.♗xc6 dxc6 7.dxe5 ♘f5 8.♕xd8+ ♔xd8



My first encounter with the Berlin Endgame occurred in 2003, in my match with Sergey Karjakin. Unprepared for this turn of the game, I struggled in vain to make something of my position, but the outcome brought me no joy. The Berlin Endgame, like the aforementioned Sveshnikov Variation and Petroff's Defense, are all sworn enemies to White.

After the exchange of queens, a maneuvering game begins, where White tries to make something out of her kingside pawn majority and the black king's unfortunate position; meanwhile, Black bets on his pair of bishops.

9.♘c3 ♗d7 10.h3 h6 11.♘e4 b6 12.b3

Nowadays, Berlin theory has developed many moves further into the endgame. Of course, in a blitz game you won't try to remember all these numerous variations – you just play your setup. For this game, I chose the most "classical" arrangement of White's pieces in this ending: b2-b3, ♗b2 and ♖ad1, ♖fe1, playing in the center.

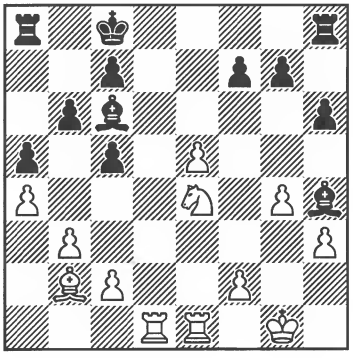
12...c5 13.♗b2 ♔c8 14.♖ad1 ♗c6 15.♖fe1 a5 16.a4!

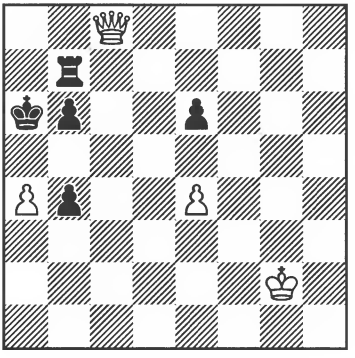
After my game against Peter-Heine Nielsen, I understood that a2-a4 is practically an automatic reaction by White against ...a7-a5 in this ending.

16...♗e7 17.g4

Trying to exploit the unfortunate placement of the black pieces.

17...♘h4 18.♘xh4 ♗xh4





19.e6!

A standard technique in these structures.

19...fxe6 20.♗xg7

White has broken up Black's kingside, and later on will seek to attack the weak e- and h-pawns.

20...♖h7 21.♗e5 h5?!

He probably shouldn't have helped White to create a passed pawn.

22.♖e3 ♔b7 23.f3 hxg4 24.hxg4 c4

Black tries to dissolve his doubled pawns and create counterplay on the queenside.

25.♔g2 cxb3 26.cxb3 ♗e7 27.♖c3 ♗b4 28.♖c2 ♖f7?

The decisive error – Black just loses a tempo. He should have played 28... ♗d5!? immediately, as after 29.♖dc1 ♗xb3 30.♖xc7+ ♖xc7 31.♖xc7+ ♔a6 the pawn races will soon begin, with the outcome still unclear.

29.♖dc1 ♗d5 30.♖xc7+ ♖xc7 31.♖xc7+ ♔a6 32.g5

But now, Black clearly comes too late.

32...♖g8 33.♖g7 ♖c8 34.g6 ♗xb3 35.♖h7 ♖c2+ 36.♔h3 ♖c1 37.g7 ♖h1+ 38.♔g2 ♖xh7 39.g8♕ ♖a7 40.♕c8+ ♖b7 41.♗d6 ♗d5 42.♗xb4 ♗xe4 43.fxe4 axb4

44.♕c4+

Of course it was better to take the e-pawn, when Black would have had to resign, since the e4-pawn would then be unstoppable.

44...♔a7 45.♕xb4 ♖c7 46.♔f3 ♖c5 47.♔f4 e5+ 48.♔f5 ♔a6

Here I lost the thread for a bit; but then I found the winning plan of trading my queen for rook and pawn, reaching a won pawn ending.

49.♔e6 ♖a5 50.♔d6 ♖c5 51.♕d2 ♔a7 52.♕b2 ♔a6 53.♕h2 ♔a7 54.♕h8 ♖a5 55.♕xe5 ♖xe5 56.♔xe5 ♔a6 57.♔d5

Black resigned.

After these successful forays at the European Team Championship and the Tal Memorial in Moscow, I returned once again to my daughter, who had turned just 8 months old at the end of 2007.

For the first half of 2008, I didn't compete anywhere, but spent the time working and preparing for the World Championship slated for June in Argentina. From the very beginning of 2008, I had decided that I really wanted to play well in this World Championship, and began preparing myself with that goal in mind. The more so in that, by

Baby Francesca with her mom

the beginning of the year, I had finally managed to assemble a strong team of trainers, and planned a series of training sessions six months ahead. In January I held several training sessions with the international grandmasters and outstanding specialists Alexander Chernin and Konstantin Landa.

By May, it was clear that the championship would not be held in Argentina; as summer approached, a new playing site was announced – the city of Nalchik, in Russia. I had to alter my entire plan of preparation and return to Europe from Miami. But I was glad to see that the championship would take place in Russia. Instead of June, the championship was pushed back to August, allowing me to set up additional sessions and to play in an open tournament in Paris. Since I had not played anywhere since the previous November, some tournament practice was just what I needed. It was a good thing for me that in 2008, my desire to work on chess and to prepare for the World Championship gained the wholehearted support of my husband and my family, who took the care of Francesca upon themselves and did all they could to make sure that I could think only of chess.

In June I competed in the Paris Open Championship, where I got off to a good start but ran out of steam in the second half.

Sportsmen are wont to seek the support of higher powers. We want to believe that we are protected, and that our chosen path is the right one. I spent many years working to free myself of the blind belief in omens. Nevertheless, to this day I still believe in good omens. In life, everything repeats itself. It's like a giant spiral, whose curves we traverse over and over again. For now, I don't know the purpose behind this traversing; but with every new turn, we are bound to reach some new level. When in 1996 I won nearly everything in sight, I told myself that the next really good year for me would be 2008. I don't know why I decided that; but I believed it would happen.

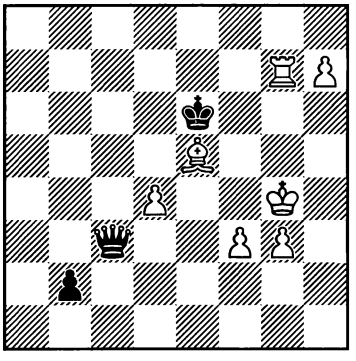
Before the 2001 World Championship, I played very badly in the Chigorin Memorial, scoring 4 out of 9. Strangely, before the World Championship in Nalchik, I played just as badly in the Paris Championship, where I also scored 4 out of 9. Despite my modest score, I started the Paris tournament very well. In Round 5, I was paired with the young French grandmaster Vachier-Lagrave. Employing a novelty in

the Marshall Attack, I expected to conclude the game with a quick victory. However, Maxime sacrificed his queen and, after a couple of poor decisions, I obtained a lost position. But in the ending I was able to find a study-like idea, which unfortunately was not implemented.

No. 52

M. Vachier-Lagrave – A. Kosteniuk

Paris 2008

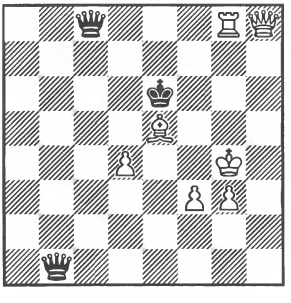


46...♕c8

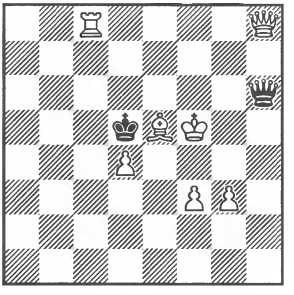
On 46...b1♕ 47.h8♕ ♕e4+ 48.♔h3 ♕f5+ 49.♔h4, the checks are over, and White wins.

47.♖g8 b1♕ 48.♖xc8!

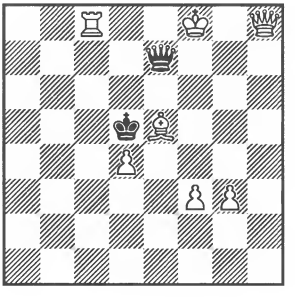
After this move, we reach an endgame where Black has every reason to expect a draw. In reply to the obvious and forced (or so it seemed to me) 48.h8♕, I had found an astounding study-like idea:



48...♔d5+! 49.♖xc8 (after 49.♔h4, White even loses, in view of 49...♕cf5) 49...♕g6+ 50.♔f4 ♕h6+! (the queen cannot be taken, because of stalemate) 51.♔f5 (51.♔g4 ♕g6+ 52.♔h3 ♕h6+ 53.♔g2 ♕d2+, with a perpetual):



51...♕h5+ 52.♔f6 ♕h6+ 53.♔f7 (53.♔e7 ♕e6+ 54.♔f8 ♕e7+:



55.♔g8 ♕f7+ 56.♔xf7 – stalemate in the center of the board!) 53...♕h5+ 54.♔g7 ♕g5+ 55.♔f7 ♕h5+ 56.♔e7 ♕f7+, and the queen again sacrifices herself to save the king.

Honestly, when my opponent bypassed that beautiful stalemating variation, I became so upset that I played the rest of the game very weakly, and resigned on move 85.

After this round, it was as though something had broken; I played the rest of my games very badly. After losing ingloriously in the last round, I caught myself thinking this was a bit of *déjà vu*. Following such a weak performance, all I

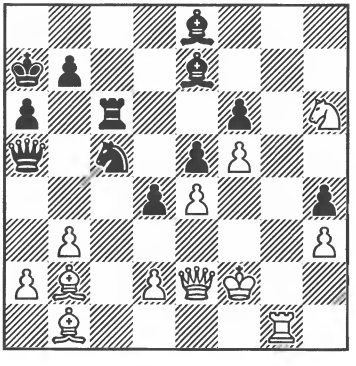
could do was to forget this local misfortune as quickly as possible, and continue to work and prepare for the World Championship.

At the end of June, I was slated to defend my title of Women's Chess960 World Champion in Mainz. This time, the title would be defended under a different system than in 2006. There would be two stages: first, a match-tournament with four players, followed by a title match between the players who finished in first and second places. The starting field included Kateryna Lahno, Viktorija Cmilyte, Natalia Zhukova, and myself. Viktorija and Natalia had qualified for this championship in 2006 and 2007 by winning the top women's prize in the open tournament. Kateryna, who was at that time the reigning European Champion, got a wild-card spot from the organizers.

In the round-robin event, I scored 5½ out of 6! In the Final, I was to meet Kateryna Lahno, who had taken second place in the match-tournament. I began the final four-game match with a convincing win. In Game 2, I outplayed my opponent with Black; but strange things started happening when I was within striking distance of the win.

K. Lahno – A. Kosteniuk

Mainz 2008 (m/2)



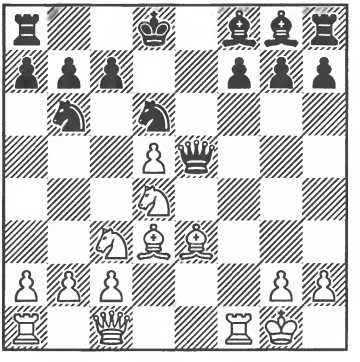
34...♗h5! 35.♕xh5 ♕xd2+ 36.♕e2 ♕xh6

Black has an extra pawn and the better position (White's bishops are hemmed in by her pawn chain); I was also far ahead on time. The outcome of this game should have been a victory for Black; however, not only did I not win – I even lost!

In the third match game, Kateryna played most unfortunately in the opening; as early as move 12, I already had what was practically a decisive advantage.

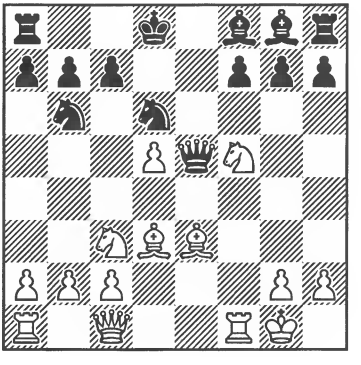
A. Kosteniuk – K. Lahno

Mainz 2008 (m/3)



12. ♘f5!

During the game I spent a long time looking at 12.♘e6+ fxe6 13.♖xf8+ ♔d7 14.♖xa8 ♘xa8 15.♗xa7 b6 16.♕f1, which would have given White an edge. I thought, however, that I should be looking for more.



12...f6??

Here White could have nailed down the victory by 13.♗xb6! axb6 14.♖e1!, trapping the queen.

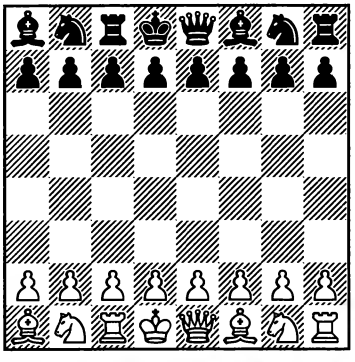
Instead, I played **13.♗f4**, and after **13...♕e8 14.♘xd6 ♗xd6 15.♗xd6 cxd6,** the game finally ended in a draw. After these two sad oversights, the match score stood at 1½-1½.

In the final, deciding game, it became my turn to find myself in a bad position, and then to win anyway, holding my title as Women's Chess960 World Champion.

No. 53

K. Lahno – A. Kosteniuk

Mainz 2008 (m/4)



Before the start of this game, I had a momentary urge to switch the king and queen's places – so strange did it seem to me to see them standing out of place.

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.♗c4

In the database at the chesstigers.de website, I found one game between two computers, which began just so, but here White played 3.b3, and after 3...♘c6 4.♗b5 b6 5.d3 ♘b4 6.c3 ♘c6 7.♕e2 0-0-0 (king goes to c8, rook to d8) 8.0-0 (king goes to g1, rook to f1) 8...♗b7 9.b4 ♘h5, the position was unclear.

3...b6

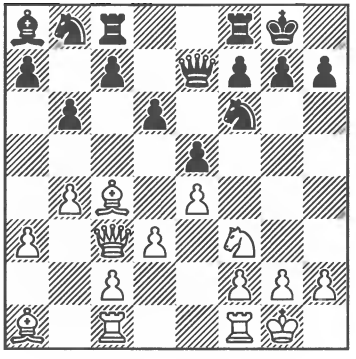
In "Chess960," the development of the pieces plays an even greater role than usual, since the pieces here are placed much less harmoniously. And if you manage to complete your development before your opponent, you can obtain a fairly large advantage. Here 3...b5!? deserved consideration, since Black could win several very valuable tempi after 4.♗xb5 ♘xe4 5.♕e2 ♘d6 6.♗a4 f6.

4.♘c3 ♗b4 5.d3 ♕e7

Too modest. 5...d5 6.exd5 ♘xd5 7.♘xe5 f6 8.♘f3 ♕g6 9.♗xd5 ♗xd5 10.♘h4 ♕f7 was more ambitious, when

Black's two bishops assure her strong compensation for the sacrificed pawn.

6.a3 ♗xc3 7.♕xc3 d6 8.b4 0-0 9.0-0



9...c6

The plan with ...d6-d5 looks perfectly logical in this position, but Black could have tried here the very same strong idea that White employed next move, namely: 9...♘h5!? ♖fe1 c5, with an unclear game.

10.♘h4!

Exploiting the fact that the black bishop on a8, being too far away from the kingside, cannot prevent the white knight from invading at f5. Black also cannot play ...g7-g6, since after f2-f4 the bishop on a1 would become too powerful.

10...♘d5

Although I didn't like my position after this move, I understood that I had to try for complications, since otherwise White's win would be too easy.

11.♘f5 ♕g5 12.♕e1 ♘f4 13.g3 d5

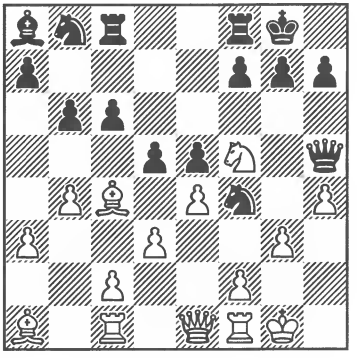
Looks too risky; however, now White had concrete problems to solve, which is not so easy to do in a 20-minute game.

14.h4

14.♗xe5 ♘h3+ 15.♔g2 dxc4 16.f4 would also have been strong enough.

14...♕h5

On 14...♕g4, I did not like 15.f3 ♕h3 16.♖f2, when the queen is imprisoned.



15.♕d1?

White yields to the pressure. She could take the perpetual after 15.gxf4 ♕g4+ 16.♔h1 (16.♘g3 exf4) 16...♕f3+, but 15.f3 would have been very strong, threatening to win the queen after g3-g4 and ♘e7+. It's not clear how Black is supposed to continue the game here. For example: 15...♖ce8 16.gxf4; 15...♖fe8 16.gxf4 dxc4 17.♕g3 ♕g6 18.♕xg6 hxg6 19.♘d6; 15...f6 16.gxf4 dxc4 17.♕g3 – the bishop at a1 will soon come into play, and Black will have no way to oppose the strong bishop and the good knight at f5.

15...♕xd1 16.♖fxd1??

The final error of the match. As Kateryna said to me after the game, she simply forgot that the rook on c1 would be hanging. 16.♖cxd1 was correct, when after 16...♘e2+ 17.♔h2 dxc4 18.♘e7+ ♔h8 19.♘xc8 ♖xc8 20.♗xe5 we would reach an interesting endgame.

16...♘e2+ 17.♔f1 ♘xc1

The rest is simple.

18.♘e7+ ♔h8 19.♘xc8 ♖xc8 20.♖xc1 dxc4 21.dxc4 c5 22.f3 ♘c6 23.b5 ♘d4 24.♔f2 f6 25.♔e3 ♖d8 26.a4

♔g8 27.a5 ♗b7 28.♗c3 ♗c8 29.g4 ♗e6

White resigned.

Winning the match with Kateryna Lahno made me two-time Women's World Chess960 Champion. I was happy to take part in the Open Rapid event, where I scored six points in the first six rounds!

No. 54 Queen's Indian Defense E17

P. Tregubov – A. Kosteniuk

Mainz 2008 (rapid)

1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 e6 3.c4 b6 4.g3 ♗b7 5.♗g2 ♗e7 6.0-0 0-0 7.♖e1 ♘a6

We were playing on the morning of August 3. The previous evening in Mainz, two games had been played in this variation: Morozevich-J.Polgar, where Black proceeded somewhat differently, and Morozevich-Carlsen. We followed this second game for a while.

7...d5 8.cxd5 exd5 9.♘c3 ♘bd7 10.♗f4 a6 11.♘e5 ♗d6 12.♕b3 ♖e8 13.♘xd7 ♕xd7 14.♘xd5 ♘e4 15.♖ad1 ♗xd5 16.♕xd5 c6 17.♕b3 ♗xf4 18.gxf4 ♖ad8 19.♕xb6 f5 20.♕xa6 ♖e6 21.♕c4 ♔h8 22.♗xe4 fxe4 23.♔h1 e3 24.f3 ♖f8 25.d5 ♖h6 26.♖g1 ♕d6 27.dxc6 ♕f6 28.c7 ♖c8 29.♕d4, and Black resigned in Morozevich-J.Polgar, Mainz 2008.

8.♘e5 d5 9.cxd5 exd5 10.♘c3 c5 11.♗g5

The main continuation here is 11.dxc5 ♘xc5 12.♗e3 ♖e8 13.♘d3, with pressure on Black's isolated pawn.

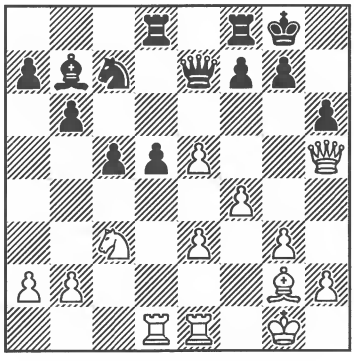
11...h6 12.♗xf6 ♗xf6 13.e3 ♗xe5 14.dxe5 ♘c7 15.♕h5?!

15.♕a4 was better, which is how the Morozevich-Carlsen game continued: 15...♕e7 16.f4 ♖fd8 17.♖ad1 ♕e6 18.b4 ♗c6 19.♕b3 ♖d7 20.bxc5 bxc5 21.♕a3 ♕e7 22.♖d2 ♖ad8 23.♖ed1 f6 24.e6 ♘xe6 25.♘xd5 ♕f7 26.♕a5 f5 27.♘e7+ ♕xe7 28.♗xc6 ♖xd2 29.♖xd2 ♔h7 30.♔f2 ♕f6 31.♗d7 c4 32.♗xe6, draw.

Getting advice from Francesca

A friendly game with Vishy Anand, Mainz, August 2008

15...♕e7 16.♖ad1 ♖ad8 17.f4?!



17...d4!

This break allows Black to solve all her opening problems, and even to seize the initiative. With the queen at a4, such a break would not have been possible, since Black's knight would not be able to leap away to b5.

18.exd4 ♗xg2 19.♔xg2 cxd4 20.♘e4 ♘d5 21.♔g1 ♘e3 22.♖d3 f6

And I brought the game home convincingly enough:

23.♘d6 fxe5 24.fxe5 ♕e6 25.b2-b3 ♖d7 26.♘c4 ♘xc4 27.bxc4 ♕xc4 28.♕e2 ♖df7 29.e6 ♖e7 30.♕e4 ♖d8 31.♖f3 ♖de8 32.♖f6 gxf6 33.♕g6+ ♔h8 34.♕xh6+ ♖h7 35.♕xf6+ ♖g7 36.♖e5 ♕c1+ 37.♔g2 ♕d2+ 38.♔h3 ♔g8 39.e7 ♖h7+ 40.♔g4 ♕d1+ 41.♔g5 ♖g7+ 42.♔h6 ♕d2+ 43.♔h5 ♕xh2+ White resigned.

After Mainz, I flew to Moscow. In suburban Pokrovskoye, from August 11 to 26, I held my final sessions before the World Championship in Nalchik.

Starting in January 2008, in preparation for the World Championship, I held seven training training. Just prior to the championship, I prepared for the event with Yuri Razuvaev. In Pokrovskoye, Konstantin Landa also came in for a few days; and for the last few days before Nalchik, I trained with Alexey Korotylev. But I flew to Nalchik without a trainer, since at precisely the same time, the Upper League of the Russian Men's Championship was taking place in Novokuznetsk, and Landa and Korotylev were both playing there, while Yuri was unable to travel to the World Championship. On August 28, my husband and I took off from Vnukovo Airport bound for Nalchik, full of hope and expectations.

Chapter 10
Nalchik – The Ascent of Olympus

I flew to the World Championship at Nalchik in good spirits, with several months of hard training and a victory in Mainz under my belt. Additionally, the playing schedule for the World Championship featured special days set aside for the tiebreakers, which would be very good for me.

Almost every strong woman player in the world came to fight for the crown of chess. The ratings favorite was the Indian, Humpy Koneru, whose rating was the first in many years, after Judit Polgar's achievement, to exceed the coveted 2600 mark. Also playing in the tournament were the current World Champion Xu Yuhua, and the former champion Antoaneta Stefanova. The largest contingent came from China. Many young and talented Chinese players flew to the championship, along with a team of trainers, doctors and interpreters.

The organizers greeted their guests in top-class fashion. Each player had a car at her disposal. The Sindica Hotel and the tournament hall were both located in the town's resort area. For the entire three weeks of the tournament, we only had rain on two days; the rest of the time, we had lovely late-summer weather. The organizers did everything possible to give the players an ideal setting, with play days for chess battles and free days for relaxation. The participants were able to get to know this rich and astonishingly beautiful land, to get better acquainted with the cultural life, history, and hospitable residents of Kabardino-Balkaria. In Nalchik, they cook some delicious meat dishes. I remember the shish kebab I had there to this day. Some two kilometers from the hotel we lived in during the championship was the Windmill restaurant, where I would go every evening for a dinner of great shish kebab.

Every day, Diego, my dad – who arrived by the third round, to lend support – and I would walk around 5 kilometers.

Shish kebabs in Nalchik are the best!

Somewhere in the middle of the tournament, I happened to glance at the World Championship logo – and saw myself! I took this as a sign from above, and to have faith that all would be well.

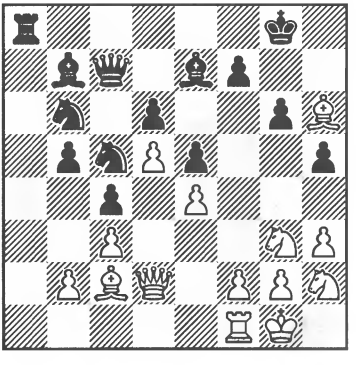
In this championship, everything went my way. There are tournaments like that, where your game is "on." You guess the openings right, you don't get into time pressure, you play easily and confidently; and your opponents, sensing your confidence, begin to get nervous and make mistakes. After winning in the first round against the Iranian Atousa Pourkashiyan, I had four whole days off, since in the second round, owing to the failure to show at the championship by Nino Khurtsidze and Ekaterina Korbut, I had no opponents. The top-rated Humpy Koneru also had no opponent for the second round. Now I can say that the additional free days did me good, because despite the length of the tournament I still had enough strength left for my final match. Following the advice of my trainer, Yuri Razuvaev, during those free days, while the other participants were playing their matches, I played training games against the computer.

In the third round, I faced Tatiana Kosintseva. It's interesting that every time I've played Tatiana, the game has been decisive. At Dresden 2004, defeating Tatiana in the last round made me European Champion. A few months later, in Kazan, Tatiana got her revenge in the Russian Superfinal and became National Champion. At the 2005 Superfinal in Samara, I managed to win our individual battle, and took first place. Now, here in Nalchik, blind chance once again brought us face to face. Of course, Russian fans of any sport, particularly knockout-system events, find any encounter between two Russians uncomfortable, since after the match is over, only one Russian remains. But that's sport for you: the one who continues will be the one who at that moment is stronger or psychologically hardier. In the first game of our match, I overlooked a number of winning continuations, and ended up taking the draw.

No. 55

A. Kosteniuk – T. Kosintseva

Nalchik 2008 (m/1)

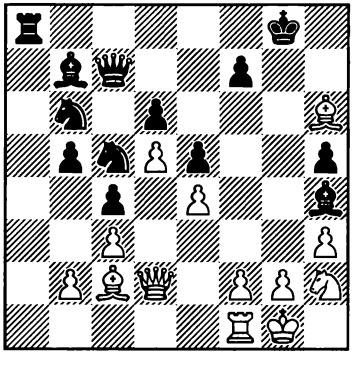


White achieved nothing out of the opening. In fact, after a few unfortunate moves, I now disliked my position intensely. But suddenly, there came:

26...♗h4?

I thought that after 26...♘bd7, White would already have to start going for broke: 27.f4 exf4 28.♕xf4 ♘e5 29.♘xh5 gxh5 30.♕g3+ ♘g6 31.♕f3, but that I probably would not find enough compensation for the sacrificed piece. But now, the sacrifice on h5 gives White very dangerous play.

27.♘xh5! gxh5



Here I spent a long time wavering between

28.♕e2!?

– the move I actually played, and 28.♗g5 ♗xg5 29.♕xg5+ ♔f8, as I had planned on playing earlier. During the game, I saw nothing concrete after 30.♕xh5 (30.f4 ♘bd7 31.fxe5 ♘xe5 32.♕xh5 ♔e8 33.♘g4 ♕e7 34.♘xe5 ♕xe5 35.♕xf7+ ♔d8 leads to unclear play) 30...♔e8. After 30...♔e7, White has the pleasant choice between perpetual check 31.♕g5+ or playing for compensation: 31.♘g4!? or 31.f4 ♘bd7 32.♘g4 exf4 33.♕g5+ f6

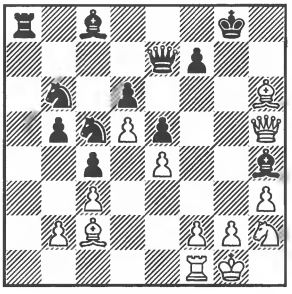
34.♕g7+ ♔d8 35.♕h8+ ♔e7 36.♕g7+ ♔d8.

31.f4 (31.♘g4 ♕e7 32.f4 exf4 33.♖xf4) 31...exf4 32.♕h8+ ♔d7. Of course, White would have some compensation for the piece, but not more than that.

28...f6

Black does not have an easy time defending this position. After 28...♗c8, for example, White has a number of

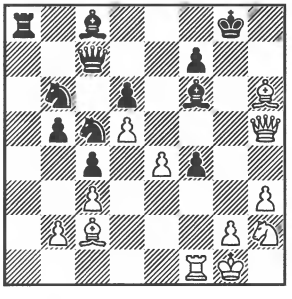
attractive continuations: 29.♕xh5 ♕e7 (29...♗f6):



and now 30.♘g4. After 30.f4!?, Black could play 30...♗g3 (30...exf4? 31.♗xf4! – threatening e4-e5 or ♗d6 – 31...♘d3 32.♗xd6) 31.♗g5 f6 32.♕g6+ ♕g7 33.♕e8+ ♕f8 34.♕g6+ with perpetual check.

30...♗f6 (30...♘d3 31.♗e3 ♖a6 32.♘h6+ ♔g7 33.♘xf7 ♕xf7 34.♕h6+ ♔g8 35.♕xh4 followed by f4) 31.♘xf6+ ♕xf6 32.f4 ♕g6 33.♕h4 with a strong attack.

28...♗f6 was still worse, in view of 29.♕xh5 ♗c8 30.f4 exf4 (or 30...♘d3 31.♗xd3 cxd3 32.fxe5 ♗xe5 33.♕g5+ ♔h8 34.♘f3 f6 35.♕h5):



31.e5! dxe5 32.♘g4 ♕d6 33.♗h7+ ♔h8 34.♗f5, and White wins.

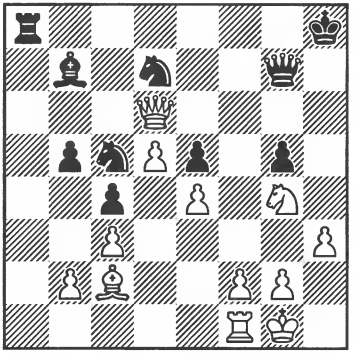
29.♕xh5 ♗g5 30.♕g6+ ♔h8 31.♗xg5 fxg5 32.♕h6+?!

After 32.♕xg5!, I would have reached the same position as I had in the game, but with 4 pawns for the piece: 32...♖g8 33.♕h6+ ♕h7 34.♕xd6 ♘bd7 35.♘g4, with advantage to White.

Worth considering were 32.♘g4!? ♕g7 33.♕xd6, or 33.♕h5+ ♔g8 34.h4.

32...♕h7 33.♕xd6 ♘bd7 34.♘g4 ♕g7

After my inaccuracy on move 32, we have reached a complex position of dynamic equality. I spent a lot of time here, and decided to prepare the break b2-b3.



35.♖b1 ♔h7

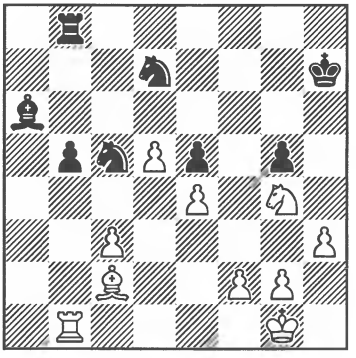
Preparing ...♕f8, which does not work right away because of 36.♘xe5.

36.♕c7

After 36.b4 we would reach a roughly even endgame: 36...cxb3 37.♗xb3 ♕f8.

36...♕h8 37.b4 cxb3 38.♗xb3 ♕b8 39.♕xb8 ♖xb8 40.♗c2 ♗a6

Time pressure is over; on the board, we have a complicated position where Black has a knight and White has pawns. It's not clear which will be better in this ending; but both White and Black have the option of just standing in place, since any kind of concrete action might very well weaken their position.



41.g3 ♔g7 42.f3 ♘b7 43.♗d3 ♘bc5 44.♗c2

Here it would have made the most sense to agree to a draw by repeating moves (44...♘b7); but Tatiana decided to keep playing. Within one move, however, she committed a grave error that could have cost her the game.

44...♖b6 45.♔f2 ♘a4? 46.♘xe5 ♘xe5 47.♗xa4 ♖h6?

It's widely known that errors always come in pairs. Upset after blundering a pawn on e5, Tatiana immediately gave up another one. Here I might have sat quietly in thought, taken the pawn on b5, and brought the game to its logical conclusion. But instead, possibly due to fatigue, I started to get sloppy.

48.♗d1?!

48.♗xb5 ♖b6 49.c4 ♘xc4 50.♗xc4 ♖xb1 51.♗xa6, and the pawns must queen.

48...♖xh3 49.♖a1?!

49.♗e2 was more accurate.

49...♖h6?!

Both players were tired, and therefore not playing their best. 49...♖h1 was stronger.

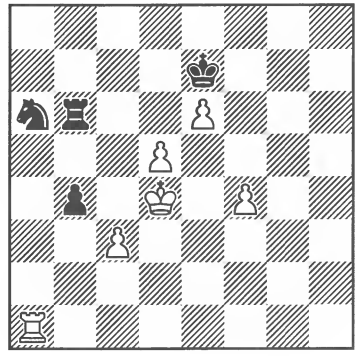
50.♗e2 ♖b6 51.♔e3 ♔f7 52.♔d4 ♘d7 53.e5

Tatiana had less than a minute on the clock; I had 15 minutes, and I thought it was all over. I relaxed prematurely, and paid for it with the loss of half a point. Not for nothing is it said that the hardest thing to do is win a won game.

53...♘b8

Here, and on every move that follows, White had a number of ways to win.

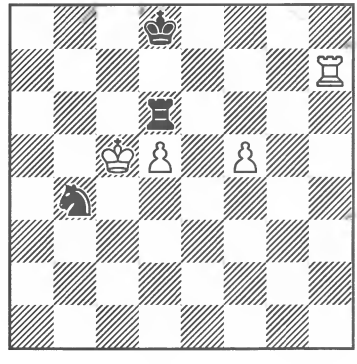
54.f4 gxf4 55.gxf4 b4 56.e6+ ♔e7 57.♗xa6 ♘xa6



58.cxb4??

Now the blockade succeeds. White would have won after 58.♔e5 b3 59.♖h1 b2 60.d6+ ♖xd6 61.♖h7+ ♔f8 62.e7+ ♔g8 63.♖h1.

58...♔d6! 59.e7 ♔xe7 60.♖e1+ ♔d7 61.f5 ♘xb4 62.♖h1 ♖d6 63.♖h7+ ♔d8 64.♔c5



Draw.

Of course, I was very upset at the conclusion of this game. I had had several winning positions, and several times I had overlooked simple decisive continuations. But the next day, I was slated to play Black; so I tried to forget this relative misfortune and begin preparing for the second game. I have already noted how important it is for a chessplayer to forget about the result of the previous game. In Nalchik, I forgot about my relative misfortunes easily enough, which had to be a great help to me.

No. 56 Ruy López C88

T. Kosintseva – A. Kosteniuk

Nalchik 2008 (m/2)

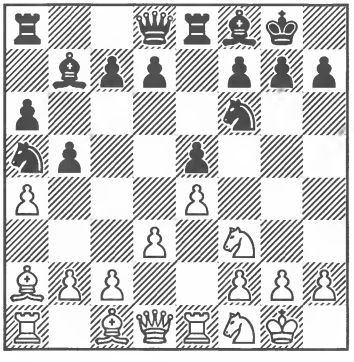
1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 a6 4.♗a4 ♘f6 5.0-0 ♗e7 6.d3

The various ways of avoiding the Marshall Attack are currently very popular for White.

6...b5 7.♗b3 0-0 8.a4 ♗b7 9.♖e1 ♖e8 10.♘bd2 ♗f8 11.♘f1

It's very difficult to think up anything new in the Ruy López. Dozens of classic games have already been played in all the main lines; contemporary praxis frequently boils down merely to a demonstration of previously played lines. For example, in this variation the moves ♘bd2, ♘f1, c2-c3, ♗a2, and then d3-d4, or using the knights on the kingside form part of White's plan; but what order to play these moves in, and what that might depend on, is something every player must decide for him- or herself. One of the best known classic games from this position was played in 1993 between Garry Kasparov and Nigel Short (London 1993): 11.c3 h6 12.♗a2 d6 13.♘h4 ♕d7 14.♘g6 ♘e7 15.♘xf8 ♔xf8 16.f3 ♖ad8 17.b4 ♘g6 18.♘b3 ♗c8 19.♗b1 ♘h5 20.axb5 axb5 21.♗e3 ♘h4 22.♖a2 ♖e6 23.d4 ♖g6 24.♔h1 ♖e8 25.dxe5 ♖xe5 26.g4 ♖f6 27.♗d4 ♘g3+ 28.hxg3 ♘xf3 29.♗xe5 ♕xg4 30.♖h2 ♘xe1 31.♕xe1 dxe5 32.♘d2 ♖d6 33.♗c2 ♗e6 34.♔g1 ♔g8 35.♘f1 ♕g5 36.♕e3 ♕d8 37.♖d2 c6 38.♖xd6 ♕xd6 39.♕c5 ♕xc5+ 40.bxc5 h5 41.♘d2 ♔f8 42.♔f2 ♔e7 43.♗b3 ♗d7 44.♘f3 ♔f6 45.c4 bxc4 46.♗xc4 ♗e6 47.♗e2 ♗g4 48.♗d1 g6 49.♗a4 ♗d7 50.♘e1 ♔e6 51.♗b3+ ♔e7 52.♘d3 f6 53.♘b4 f5 54.♗a4 fxe4 55.♗xc6 ♗xc6 56.♘xc6+ ♔e6 57.♔e3 g5 58.♔xe4 h4 59.gxh4, and Black resigned.

11...♘a5 12.♗a2



12...d5!?

Pushing the pawn to d5 is one of Black's basic ideas in the Ruy. In this exact position, the move is a novelty which I found during preparations for the game. Black's idea is that, after 13.axb5 axb5 14.exd5, she has 14...♘xd5! (14...♗xd5 is inferior: after 15.♗g5! White has a slight advantage) 15.♘xe5 ♘b3! 16.cxb3 ♘b4.

13.♘g3 h6 14.♗d2 b4 15.exd5 ♗xd5 16.♗xd5 ♕xd5 17.b3

At home, I had looked at 17.♕e2 ♘c6 18.♘e4 ♘d7 – and that was the end of my analysis. Black has a good position, which looked easier to play than White's.

17...♖ad8 18.♗e3?!

The start of a mistaken plan, which led White to complete disaster. She gives up her dark-squared bishop, hoping that opening the f-file will give her the chance to put together some kind of kingside play. But the dynamics in White's position provide insufficient compensation for its static drawbacks. Once Black defends herself from her opponent's temporary threats, she will begin attacking White's weaknesses.

18...♘g4 19.♘d2 ♘xe3 20.fxe3 ♕e6 21.♕f3 g6 22.e4 ♕c6 23.♖f1 ♖d7 24.♕g4 ♖e6 25.♘c4

After 25.♖ac1, Black would bring her dark-squared bishop to g5, when it becomes absolutely clear that in this position the bishop is far stronger than the knight: 25...♗c5+ 26.♔h1 ♗e3 27.♕e2 ♗g5.

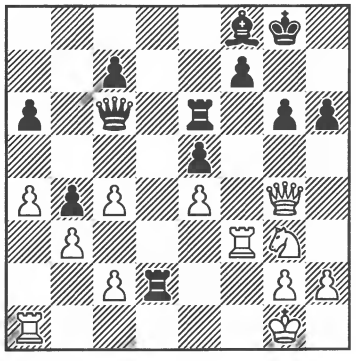
25...♘xc4

White faces an unpleasant choice: either take with the d-pawn and open a center file, or take with the b-pawn and condemn the a-pawn to a certain doom.

26.dxc4 ♖d2

Black's game is strategically won; however, recalling what happened in the first game, I tried to play accurately to the end.

27.♖f3



27...♖f6!

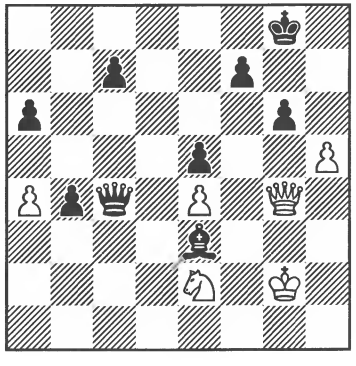
After the exchange of a pair of rooks, White's play on the f-file is effectively over.

28.♖af1 ♖xf3 29.♕xf3 ♕d7 30.h3 ♖xc2 31.♖d1 ♗c5+ 32.♔h2 ♖d2 33.♖xd2 ♕xd2 34.♘e2 ♗e3

During the game, I had two ideas. The first was to play for *zugzwang* after 34...♕d1 35.h4 h5, when White would have trouble finding a move. But finally I decided to pursue the second idea: after 34...♗e3, Black just wants to take all of White's queenside pawns.

35.h4 h5 36.g3 ♕d3 37.g4 ♕xb3 38.♔g2 hxg4 39.♕xg4 ♕xc4 40.h5

White's position is lost, of course; but Black must be careful, since White still has that dangerous combination of pieces – queen and knight.



40...♔g7 41.♘g3

On 41.hxg6, I had intended to play 41...f5!.

41...♕c2+ 42.♔h3 ♗f4 43.hxg6 ♕d3!

The most accurate, although I could also have won by 43...fxg6 44.♘h5+ ♔f8 45.♘xf4 (45.♕c8+ ♔e7) 45...exf4 46.♕xf4+ ♔g8.

44.gxf7+ ♔xf7 45.♕h5+ ♔e7 46.♕h4+ ♔d7 47.♕g4+ ♔c6

And the black king escapes the checks. White resigned.

Despite the apparent ease of Black's victory here, the game itself was very tense and complex. I was very glad, after the first game had gone so badly for me, that I had been able to win so "easily" in the second, especially playing Black. After this win, I broke into the World Championship Quarterfinals for the first time since 2001. In 2004, I had lost in the round of 32, and in 2006, I lost out in the round of 16.

In Nalchik, the quarterfinal pairings were: myself and Anna Ushenina, representing Ukraine – she would be my next-round opponent; Humpy Koneru of India and Shen Yang of China; Lilit Mkrtchian of Armenia vs. Hou Yifan of China; and Pia Cramling of Sweden facing former world champion Antoaneta Stefanova.

In this World Championship, not only would I not lose a game, but I never had to play a tiebreaker – all my matches finished at the classical time controls. This meant that after each match, I had a free day, in which I took great pleasure in traveling and getting acquainted with the sights of the Kabardino-Balkaria region. I visited the Chegemsky Falls, saw the Blue Lake's unusual color, and climbed into the foothills of Mt. Elbrus. Each journey was accompanied by a tasty dinner – appetizing shish kebab (even now, the memory of these still makes my mouth water) and "hichini" – a regional dish made from pastry and cheese or meat. These pleasant days off allowed me to unwind and return to battle the following day with renewed strength.

In the first game of the quarterfinal against Anna Ushenina, having White, I obtained a slight advantage; but my opponent's stubborn defense earned her the draw. But in the second game, Anna misplayed the opening, and the fight was really over then.

No. 57 Nimzo-Indian Defense E35

A. Ushenina – A. Kosteniuk

Nalchik 2008 (m/2)

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3

Anna plays a great number of openings, but I hadn't expected to see the Nimzo-Indian.

3...♗b4 4.♕c2

When I saw this move, I had an unpleasant feeling of *déjà vu*. It was in this exact variation that I had lost to Viktorija Cmilyte in the 2006 World Championship.

4...d5 5.cxd5

Viktorija played 5.a3.

5...exd5 6.♗g5 c5 7.dxc5 h6 8.♗h4 g5 9.♗g3 ♘e4 10.e3 ♕a5

One of the contemporary sharp lines of the Nimzo-Indian.

At the foot of Mount Elbrus

Postcard scene from the Blue Lake

11.♗e5

11.♘ge2 ♗f5 12.♗e5 0-0 is the main line here, with various sharp offshoots after 13.♘d4.

11...0-0

Here, after prolonged thought, Anna selected

12.♗d3

12.♘ge2 ♗f5 leads to the main lines.

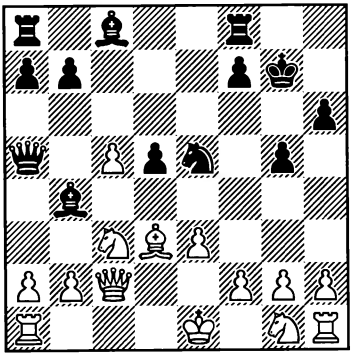
12...♘c6

I remembered that this move had not been considered dangerous for Black after one of the Kasparov-Short match games in 1993.

13.♗xe4 ♘xe5 14.♗h7+?!

After 14.♗xd5 ♗g4 15.♘f3 ♗xf3 16.♗xf3 ♘xf3+ 17.gxf3 ♖ac8 18.0-0, a draw was agreed in Kasparov-Short, London 1993.

14...♔g7 15.♗d3

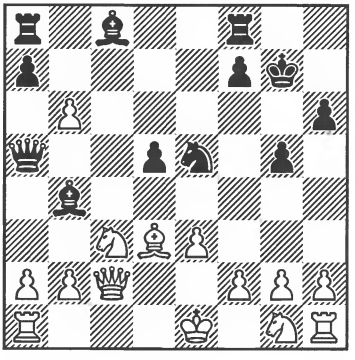


15...b6?!

I was entranced by the interesting idea I executed in the game, but White could have played more accurately. An immediate 15...d4! was stronger: after 16.exd4 ♗xc3+ 17.bxc3 ♘xd3+ 18.♕xd3, and here 18...♖e8+ or 18...♗f5 gives Black strong compensation for the pawn in view of White's lack of development.

16.cxb6?

The decisive error. After 16.♘ge2 bxc5 17.0-0, White would at least have completed her development. Still, she would have had definite problems to solve after 17...♘xd3 18.♕xd3 ♗a6 19.♕f5 (opening the d-file here would play right into Black's hands: 19.♕xd5 ♗xc3 20.♘xc3 ♗xf1 21.♖xf1 ♖ad8) 19...♗xc3 20.♘xc3 ♗xf1 21.♖xf1, but White would still have drawing chances, thanks to the weakness of Black's king.

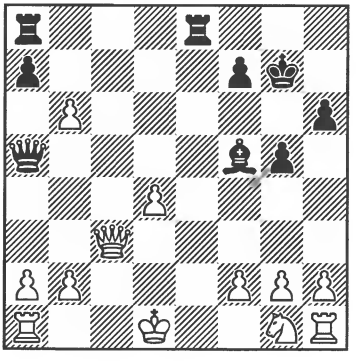


But now Black's attack plays itself.

16...d4 17.exd4 ♘xd3+ 18.♕xd3 ♖e8+ 19.♔d1 ♗f5

Black, of course. had more than one way to prosecute her attack.

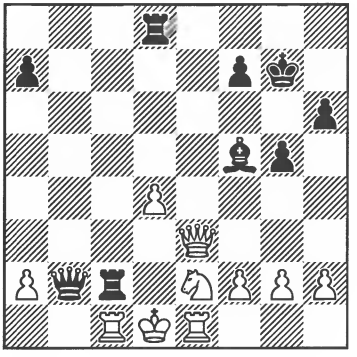
20.♕d2 ♗xc3 21.♕xc3



21...♕xb6

21...♕a6!? deserved consideration, not allowing White to get her knight out.

22.♘e2 ♖ac8 23.♕a3 ♖c2 24.♖e1 ♖d8 25.♕e3 ♕xb2 26.♖c1



And here I had the pleasant choice of playing either 26...♖dc8 or

26...♖e8

White resigned, putting me into the semifinal round. The other semifinalists were Humpy Koneru, Hou Yifan, and Pia Cramling, all rated over 2500. On the FIDE rating list published July 1, 2008, these women were ranked second, fourth, and sixth respectively (before the championship, with my 2510 rating, I was in tenth place).

In the next stage, my opponent was the famous Swedish chess player, Pia Cramling. The first game of the match went well: after Black's error in choosing a plan, I gave my opponent no chance, and won in strict positional style, employing the classic principle of the two weaknesses.

No. 58 French Defense C10

A. Kosteniuk – P. Cramling

Nalchik 2008 (m/1)

1.e4 e6

This came as a complete surprise. I had prepared mainly for the Sicilian Defense,

as lately Pia has played it almost exclusively. But as Pia said at the post-game press conference, she had played the French Defense in her youth, and decided to surprise me with her choice of opening.

2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 ♘c6

Not the most popular move in this position. When I saw the French appear on the board, I thought that at some point, Pia would take on e4.

4.♘f3 ♘f6 5.e5 ♘e4 6.♗d3 ♗b4 7.♗d2 ♘xd2 8.♕xd2 f6 9.a3 ♗xc3 10.♕xc3 fxe5 11.dxe5 ♕e7

In modern chess, if White manages to get even a small advantage out of the opening, it's considered a success. I was satisfied with the outcome of this opening: Black has a pretty cramped position, while I can choose whatever plan I like.

12.h4

Of course I was in no hurry to castle: I wanted to give Black the chance to declare herself first.

12...♗d7 13.b4 a6 14.h5 0-0-0

On 14...0-0, of course, I would have played 15.♖h3.

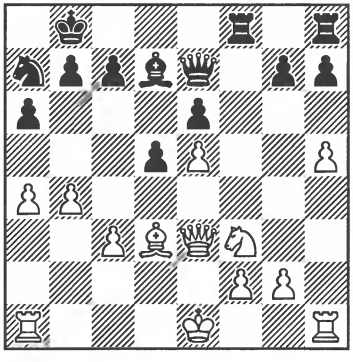
15.♕d2 ♔b8 16.c3 ♖df8

Interesting alternatives were 16...g6 and 16...♖hf8.

17.♕e3 ♘a7?

It's not even the move itself that's so wrong (although removing the knight from the center is dubious enough): it's the plan connected with it. Black should have played 17...♗e8.

18.a4



18...c5?

Practically the decisive mistake: Black opens lines in front of her own king. 18...g6 or 18...♕e8 were preferable.

19.bxc5 ♖c8 20.♖b1 ♕xc5

On 20...♔a8, during the game I had calculated the following variation: 21.♖h4 ♖xc5 22.♖hb4 ♖c7 23.♕b6 ♕d8 24.♘g5! ♖f8 25.♗xa6! bxa6 26.♘f7! ♕c8 27.♘d6 ♕d8 28.♕xa6. When I checked it at home, my computer verified my calculations: Black cannot defend her king. For example: 28...♕g5 29.♖b7 ♕xe5+ 30.♔f1.

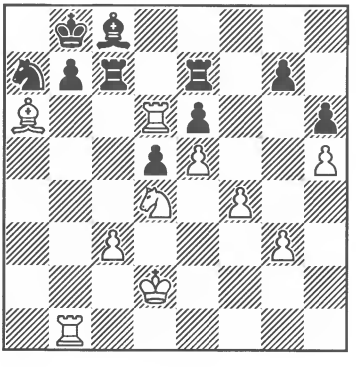
21.♕xc5 ♖xc5 22.♗xa6 ♖c7

22...♗c8 would have held out longer, by not tying the rook down to the defense. However, after 23.♔d2 ♖a5 24.♗d3 ♖xa4 25.♘d4, White still has the better position.

23.♔d2 ♗xa4 24.♖b4 ♗d7 25.♖hb1 ♗c8 26.♘d4 ♖e8 27.f4 ♖ee7 28.♖b6

The position on the board is a classic example of playing against two weaknesses: Black doesn't have the resources to defend her weak pawns.

28...h6 29.g3 ♖e8 30.♖d6 ♖ee7



31.♗f1!

I was very proud of this bishop transfer during the game.

31...♗d7 32.♗h3 ♘c8 33.♗xe6!

It's no secret that in such overwhelming positions, one often finds the winning combination.

33...♘xd6 34.exd6 ♗xe6 35.dxe7

35.♖e1 would win too.

35...♗d7

On 35...♗f7, 36.♘f5 would have ended matters.

36.♘f5

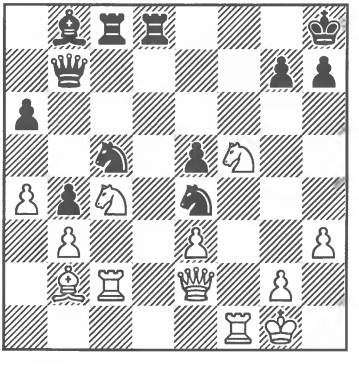
There is no defense against ♘d6 or ♘xg7 (either immediately or after ♖e1). Black resigned.

In our second game, Pia chose a quiet variation of the Queen's Gambit, which gave me no problems equalizing. But as we approached the first time control the position grew sharper, and I played an inaccuracy, which my opponent might have exploited.

No. 59

P. Cramling – A. Kosteniuk

Nalchik 2008 (m/2)



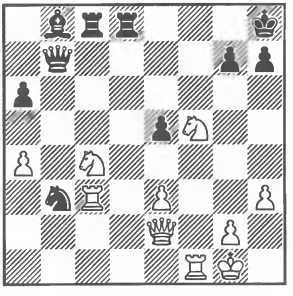
28...♘c3?

The computer tells me that White's attack is not dangerous after either

28...♖f8 or 28...♖e8; or even on 28...♘xb3 29.♕g4 ♘f6 30.♕h4 ♖c6 31.♘xg7 ♕xg7 32.♘xe5 ♖xc2 33.♘f7+ ♕xf7 34.♗xf6+ ♔g8 35.♕g4+ ♕g6 36.♕e6+ ♕f7. But at the board, everything terrifies you; and I decided that if I sacrificed a pawn to get rid of White's strong bishop, then I shouldn't have any problem with equality.

29.♕g4?!

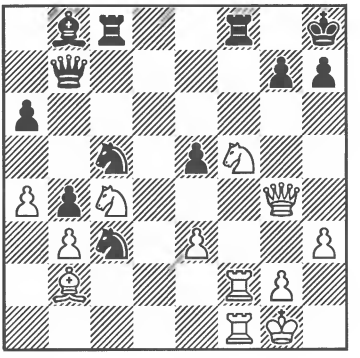
Pia took my word for it, but she shouldn't have: after 29.♗xc3 bxc3 30.♖xc3, the move I had intended, 30...♘xb3 (Black loses after 30...e4 31.♕g4 g6 32.♘h6 ♖f8 33.♖f7 ♕d5 34.♖c1 ♕e6 35.♖cf1 ♖xf7 36.♘xf7+ ♔g7 37.♕d1):



doesn't work because of 31.♘cd6! ♗xd6 32.♘xd6 ♖xd6 33.♕f3!, and White wins.

29...♖f8 30.♖cf2?

It was still not too late to take on c3: 30.♗xc3 bxc3 31.♖xc3 g6 32.♘cd6, and all captures lead to a position with an extra pawn for White and chances to win: 32...gxf5 (32...♗xd6 33.♘xd6 ♖xf1+ 34.♔xf1 ♖f8+ 35.♔g1 ♕d5 36.♕c4 ♕d1+ 37.♔h2 ♕xd6 38.♕xc5 ♕xc5 39.♖xc5 ♖b8 40.♖c3 ♔g7 41.♔g3) 33.♘xb7 fxg4 34.♖xc5 gxh3 35.♖xf8+ ♖xf8 36.gxh3.



30...♘d3!

The most exact. By this time, I had seen the variation that actually occurs in the game.

31.♘fd6 ♗xd6 32.♘xd6 ♘xf2 33.♖xf2 ♕d5! 34.♘xc8 ♖xf2 35.♔xf2 ♕d2+ 36.♔g3??

Not wishing to settle for the inevitable draw, White's king hurries straight into a mating net. She had to play 36.♔f1 ♕d3+.

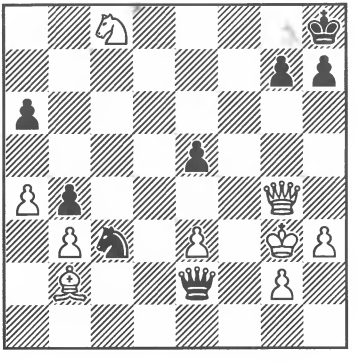
36...♕e1+ 37.♔f3 ♕e2+

Here, instead of securing the draw, I should have stopped, taken a deep breath, and finished up with a win: 37...e4+ 38.♔f4 ♕f2+ 39.♔g5 ♕f6+ 40.♔h5 ♕h6#.

38.♔g3 ♕e1+ 39.♔f3 ♕e2+

And once again, 39...e4 leads to mate.

40.♔g3



Draw.

The other semifinal match, between Humpy Koneru and the 14-year-old Chinese *wunderkind* Hou Yifan, featured very intense fighting. After winning the first game, Hou blundered horribly in the second; thus, the score at the end of the first stage was 1-1. In rapid chess, Koneru once again pulled back even after losing the first game, and the score reached 2-2. In the blitz games, however, Hou did manage to break down her notable opponent's resistance, winning this tense encounter by a score of 4-2 and thereby becoming the youngest World Championship finalist in history.

Before the final, consisting of four games, there would be one last free day. Once again, we experienced the hospitality of our hosts; the next day, we were ready to face the biggest and most difficult challenge of the Nalchik tournament: the final match for the title of 12th Women's World Chess Champion.

And so, here I was, seven years later, playing another title match. A lot had changed in my life in those seven years. I had played at least a couple of hundred tournament games, attended over fifty training sessions, won perhaps a thousand games in simultaneous exhibitions, given innumerable interviews, made my film début, given my first public speech, written two books, graduated from the university, gotten married – and, most importantly, given birth to a wonderful baby, who was now back in Moscow, rooting for her Mama throughout the whole match. I'd had to go through thick and thin to get a second chance to fight for the chess crown. For my encounter with Hou Yifan, in contrast to the final match in 2001, now it was my opponent who played the role of underdog, as she was only 14!

The final match was under control from start to finish. In nearly every game, I had winning chances. The number of unconverted extra pawns in this match probably broke all records. In the first game, I managed to win with Black; and in the end, that proved decisive.

No. 60 Ruy López C90

Hou Yifan – A. Kosteniuk

Nalchik 2008 (m/1)

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 a6 4.♗a4 ♘f6 5.0-0 ♗e7 6.♖e1 b5 7.♗b3 0-0 8.a3

White avoids the concrete lines of the Marshall, and strives for advantage by exploiting nuances. My opponent's move came as a surprise to me, as I had thought she would employ a different version of the Anti-Marshall, beginning with 8.a4.

8...d6

Since I knew almost nothing of this variation, I tried to employ logic in order to resolve the opening problem. In 2008, Magnus Carlsen had used this variation twice with White and achieved a very good result – although I have my doubts that the opening was the main reason for this:

8...♗c5 9.c3 d6 10.h3 ♗b6 11.d3 h6 12.♘bd2 ♘e7 13.♘f1 ♘g6 14.♘g3 ♗b7 15.♘f5 ♗c8 16.d4 ♗e6 17.dxe5 ♗xb3 18.♕xb3 dxe5 19.♕c2 ♖e8 20.c4 bxc4 21.♕xc4 ♕d7 22.♗e3 ♕e6 23.♕xe6

♖xe6 24.g3 ♖b8 25.♗d2 ♘f8 26.♗c3 ♘8d7 27.♖e2 ♖be8 28.♘d2 ♘c5 29.♔g2 ♘a4 30.♖c1 ♖c6 31.♘e3 ♘xc3 32.♖xc3 ♖xc3 33.bxc3 ♗a5 34.♘d1 ♖d8 35.♘c4 ♖xd1 36.♘xa5 ♖d3 37.♘c4 ♖xc3 38.♘xe5 ♖xa3 39.f3 ♖a5 40.♘c6 ♖c5 41.♘d4 a5 42.♖a2 ♖c4 43.♘f5 a4 44.♘e3 ♖c3 45.♔f2 a3 46.♘c2 ♘d7 47.♘xa3 ♘e5 48.f4 ♘d3+ 49.♔g2 ♘b4 50.♖b2 c5 51.♘b5 ♖d3 52.e5 g5 53.fxg5 hxg5 54.♘d6 ♖e3, and drawn in Carlsen-Leko, Nice 2008; and

8...♗c5 9.c3 d6 10.d4 ♗b6 11.h3 ♖e8 12.♗g5 h6 13.♗h4 exd4 14.cxd4 g5 15.♗g3 g4 16.hxg4 ♗xg4 17.♗h4 ♘xd4 18.♘c3 ♗xf3 19.gxf3 ♔h8 20.♘d5 ♖g8+ 21.♔f1 ♘g4 22.♕xd4+ ♗xd4 23.♗xd8 ♘h2+ 24.♔e2 ♖axd8 25.♖ad1 ♗xb2 26.♖h1 c6 27.♘f4 ♗e5 28.♘d3 ♘xf3 29.♔xf3 ♗g7 30.♖h5 d5 31.exd5 ♖d6 32.♖f5 cxd5 33.♖c1 ♖f6 34.♖xf6 ♗xf6 35.♖c6 ♔g7 36.♘f4 ♗g5 37.♘h5+ ♔h8 38.♖xa6 d4 39.♔e4 ♖g6 40.♖a7, and Black resigned in Carlsen-Aronian, Morelia/Linares 2008.

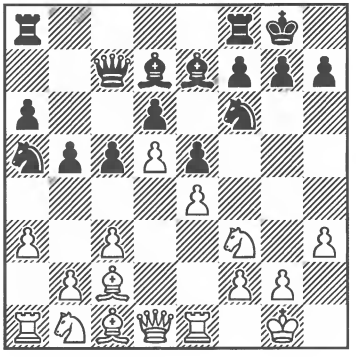
9.c3 ♗g4 10.d3 ♘a5 11.♗c2

This move surprised me a little, too. It seemed to me that 11.♗a2 would have been more consistent for White.

11...c5 12.h3 ♗d7 13.d4 ♕c7 14.d5

Turning the opening into a classical Chigorin Ruy – but with practically an extra tempo for Black, since adding the moves a3 and ...♗d7 is clearly good for the second player. Since I had had this kind of structure before with White, I knew the basic ideas and plans for both sides, and this gave me a definite playing advantage.

In 2006, Morozevich used the alternative, 14.b4!?, to win his game against Bruzón in Biel.

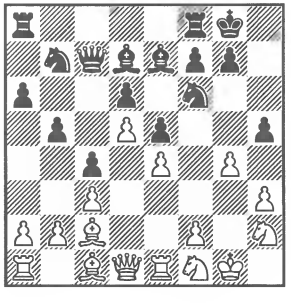


14...c4 15.♘bd2 ♘b7 16.♘f1 ♘c5 17.g4?!

A very risky move. Keres had previously used it, with his pawn back on a2 and the opposing knight on b7. This game against Hou has a very interesting backstory. In April 2008, I gave a lecture at the New York club named after Frank Marshall, on the theme of "The Ruy López." The following day, I competed in a blitz tournament, where I lost practically without a fight on the White side of the Ruy, and precisely because I played this same idea, g2-g4.

So that you, dear reader, may see just how similar these two games were to each other, I present my blitz game in its entirety:

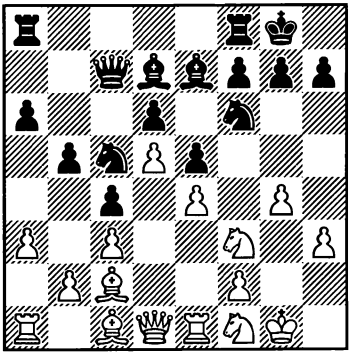
1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 a6 4.♗a4 ♘f6 5.0-0 b5 6.♗b3 ♗e7 7.♖e1 d6 8.c3 0-0 9.h3 ♘a5 10.♗c2 c5 11.d4 ♕c7 12.d5 ♗d7 13.♘bd2 ♘b7 14.♘f1 c4 15.g4 h5 16.♘3h2?:



Now, doesn't this position remind you of something?

16...hxg4 17.hxg4 ♘h7 18.♘g3 g6 19.♗h6 ♖fb8 20.♕d2 ♕d8 21.♗e3 ♗g5 22.♔g2 ♗xe3 23.♖xe3 ♕g5 24.♕e2 ♔g7 25.♖g1 ♘f6 26.f3 ♖h8 27.♘hf1 ♕f4 28.♕f2 ♖h7 29.♘e2 (29.♖e1) 29...♕g5 30.♕g3 ♖ah8 31.b3 cxb3 32.axb3 ♘c5 33.b4 ♘b7 34.♗d3 a5 35.bxa5 ♘xa5 36.♔f2 ♘b3 37.♗c2 ♘c5 38.♔e1 ♖h1 39.♕g2 ♖xg1 40.♕xg1 ♖a8 41.♔f2 ♖a2 42.♗d1 ♗xg4 43.♘fg3 ♕f4, and White resigned. Kosteniuk-Robert Hungaski, New York 2008.

Normal continuations for White here would be 17.♘3h2 a5 18.f4, or 17.♘g3.



17...h5!

Of course Black wants to hinder her opponent from putting her knight on g3.

18.♘3h2?

White should not have allowed Black to close the g-file. Hou should have played 18.gxh5 ♗xh3, and only now 19.♘3h2, in hopes of using the open g-file to attack.

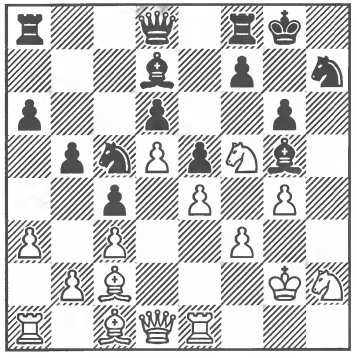
18...hxg4 19.hxg4 ♕c8?!

Forcing my opponent to weaken her dark squares. However, 19...♘h7 was better.

20.f3 ♘h7 21.♘g3 ♗g5 22.♘f5!?

An interesting idea, but Hou lacked the nerve to carry it through.

22...♕d8 23.♔g2 g6

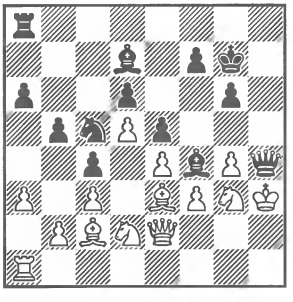


24.♘g3

After this retreat, Black's advantage is indisputable. White could have tried to confuse the issue by 24.♘xd6!? ♗xc1 (24...♕f6 25.♗xg5 ♘xg5 26.♕d2 ♘h7 27.♘f5 gxf5 28.gxf5 ♕g7+ 29.♘g4) 25.♕xc1 ♕f6 26.♘f5 gxf5 27.gxf5 ♕g5+ (27...♕g7+ 28.♔h1 f6 29.♕e3 ♖ac8 30.♘g4 ♕g5, or 30...♘g5 31.♔g2; 27...♔h8 28.♘g4 ♖g8 29.♖h1) 28.♘g4, when, although Black is a piece up, she needs to be very careful. For example, after 28...♕xc1 29.♖axc1 f6 30.♖h1 ♔g7 31.♖cg1, White would have very strong compensation for the knight: 31...♘g5 32.♘xe5 fxe5 33.♔f2, etc.

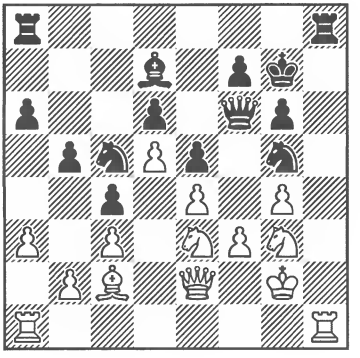
24...♔g7 25.♖h1 ♖h8 26.♘hf1 ♕f6 27.♗e3 ♗xe3

27...♗f4 28.♕e2 ♘g5 29.♘d2 ♘h3! 30.♗xc5 (30.♖xh3 ♖xh3 31.♔xh3 ♕h4+! was worth considering:



32.♔xh4 ♖h8+ 33.♘h5+ ♖xh5+ 34.gxh5 g5#) 30...dxc5 31.♘df1 ♕h4 32.♕e1 ♗xg3 33.♘xg3 ♘f4+ 34.♔f2 ♕g5 35.♕e3 ♘h3+ 36.♔e2 ♕h4 37.♘f1 ♘f4+ 38.♕xf4 exf4 39.♖xh4 ♖xh4, with an overwhelming advantage.

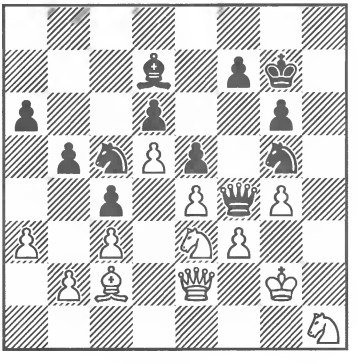
28.♘xe3 ♘g5 29.♕e2



29...♖ag8?!

I couldn't see a way to develop my initiative, so I decide simply to wait. Now I think I should have played 29...♘d3!? 30.♗xd3 cxd3 31.♕f2 ♕f4 32.♖ad1, and although it seems that the pawn at d3 must be lost within a move or two, it's not so easily captured: 32...a5 33.♖xh8 (33.♖xd3 ♖xh1 34.♔xh1 ♘h3, or 34.♘xh1 ♘xe4 35.♕e2 ♖h8, with an attack) 33...♖xh8 34.♘ef1 (34.♖xd3 ♘xe4 35.fxe4 ♖h2+) 34...♕f6 35.♖xd3 ♘h3 36.♕e3 ♘f4+ 37.♔g1 ♘xd3 38.♕xd3 ♕f4.

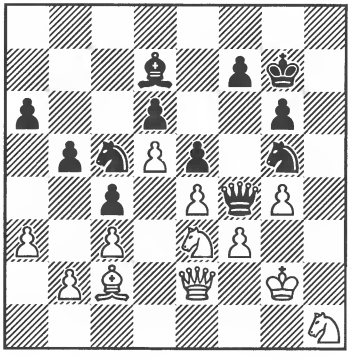
30.♖af1 ♕f4



31.♖xh8?

Hou cannot take the pressure, and decides to trade rooks, forgetting about the very strong resource that Black obtains after the trade. She should have continued 31.♕f2, when it's hard to say which plan I would have preferred. During the game, I was thinking about playing on the queenside; but although Black's position would be better, it's not clear if she could extract anything concrete out of her small advantage.

31...♖xh8 32.♖h1 ♖xh1 33.♘xh1



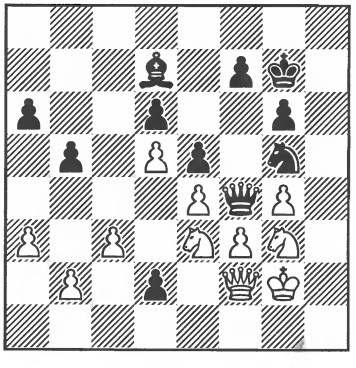
33...♘d3!

After this move, White's position collapses like a house of cards.

34.♗xd3

On 34.♘g4, Black would continue 34...♘xf3 35.♗xd3 ♘h4+ 36.♔h3 cxd3 37.♕xd3 ♘f3, with total domination.

34...cxd3 35.♕f2 d2 36.♘g3



36...♘xf3!

After 36...♕xe3 37.♕xe3 d1♕ 38. ♕xg5, White would have had some initiative.

37.♕xf3 ♗xg4!

This move practically ends the game. In this game, I was able to maintain accuracy to the very end.

38.♕f2 d1♕ 39.♘xd1 ♗xd1 40.♕e1 ♗f3+ 41.♔g1 f5 42.exf5 gxf5 43.♕f2 ♔g6 44.b3 e4 45.c4 bxc4 46.bxc4 ♕g5 47.c5 f4 48.cxd6 fxg3

The final touch – 48...♕xg3+?? 49.♕xg3+ fxg3 50.d7 would have been bad. After my move, White resigned.

The World Championship began in Nalchik on August 28; we played the fourth, and last, game of our match on September 17. Three whole weeks of continuous struggle! And in addition, my young opponent, besides her main match games, had also had to play out two tiebreakers. Everyone's strength had reached its limit, and the nervous tension was so high, it beggars description. Still, I was ahead 2-1 in the match, and there was only one game left, in which I had White.

No. 61 Sicilian Defense B85

A. Kosteniuk – Hou Yifan

Nalchik 2008 (m/4)

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘c6 5.♘c3 d6 6.♗e3 ♘f6 7.♗e2

It was fairly easy to predict that, by one move order or another, there would be a Scheveningen Sicilian on that day. While preparing for the game, I had decided to go for the most solid continuation, since for me a draw in this game counted the same as a win.

7...♗e7 8.0-0 a6 9.a4 0-0 10.f4 ♕c7 11.♔h1 ♗d7 12.♘b3 b6 13.♕e1

For this game, I gave up the g2-g4 plan in favor of piece play.

13...♗c8 14.♕g3 ♗b7 15.f5?!

I should have continued the central game by 15.♖ad1!? instead of weakening the e5 square. Then I would still have had the choice of continuing with either f4-f5 or e4-e5.

15...♔h8 16.♖ad1 ♖ae8

Remember that Black needed a win in this game; therefore, variations resulting in multiple exchanges would have to be good for White: 16...♘b4 17.fxe6 ♘xc2 18.exf7 ♘xe3 19.♕xe3 ♖xf7 20.♘d4, etc.

17.fxe6 fxe6 18.♕h3

The immediate 18.♘d4!? ♘xd4 19.♖xd4 deserved attention.

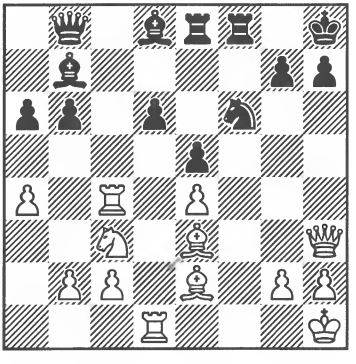
18...♗d8 19.♘d4 ♘xd4 20.♖xd4

During the game I was a bit afraid to decide to move my rook to c4; but in the end, I decided that nothing could threaten my rook on the fourth rank.

20...e5 21.♖c4 ♕b8 22.♖d1

I liked my position – especially after Hou sank into thought for over forty minutes. In the end, she made absolutely the correct decision.

After 22.♗d3, Black has a plan: to put her queen at a8 and force through ...b6-b5: 22...♕a8 23.♘d5 b5 24.axb5 axb5. I therefore decided to tie Black's queen to the defense of the d-pawn.



22...b5!? 23.axb5 axb5

My young opponent was forcing me to resolve concrete problems. The first was, which of the two sacrificed pawns should I take?

24.♘xb5

After 24.♖b4 ♗a5 25.♖xb5 ♗xc3 26.bxc3 ♕c7, the position is probably about equal, but I didn't like White's pawn weaknesses.

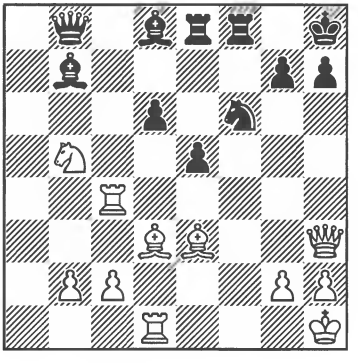
24...♘xe4

On 24...♗a6, I could even sacrifice the exchange by 25.♘xd6.

25.♗d3

On 25.♗h5, I really didn't like 25...♗g5, when the bishop cannot move from e3 because of the fork at f2. When you go home and check the calculations you went through, sometimes you're surprised by how many possibilities you rejected just because, emotionally, you felt that you "liked" or "didn't like" them. If we extend this variation, we find it's not so bad: 26.♗g6 h6 27.♗xe4 ♗xe4 28.♘xd6 ♖d8 29.♖xe4 ♖xd6 30.♖e1 ♖df6 31.♗g1 ♕xb2 32.♕b3 is equal.

25...♘f6



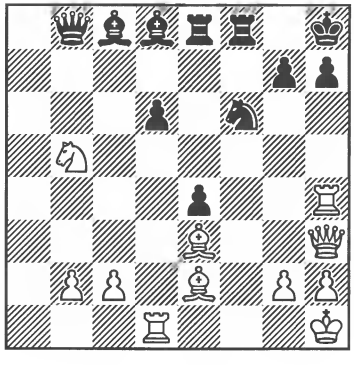
26.♖h4

During the game, at first I wanted very much to play 26.♗g6; finally,

however, I decided on ♖h4. Had I chosen the other line, perhaps I would not have had to endure as many unpleasant moments as I did in the game. The continuation might be: 26... ♗xg2+! (practically the only resource Black has left) 27.♕xg2 ♕xb5 28.♖h4, and already Black must defend. For example, after 28...♕xb2, White mates with 29.♖xh7+ ♘xh7 30.♕h3 ♕b7+ 31.♔g1. On 28...♔g8 29.♗xe8 ♘xe8, the position is about equal. Black will find it hard to set White any sort of concrete problems: 30.♖g4 (or 30.c4 ♕b3 31.♕d5+ ♔h8 32.♖h3 ♗g5 33.♖f3) 30...♕xb2 31.♕d5+ ♔h8 32.♕b3 ♕xb3 33.cxb3.

26.♗a7! also deserved consideration. Honestly, though, it wasn't one of the candidate moves I looked at over the board: 26...♗xg2+ (26...♕a8 27.♖h4) 27.♕xg2 ♕xb5 28.♖c7 ♕d5 29.♖xg7.

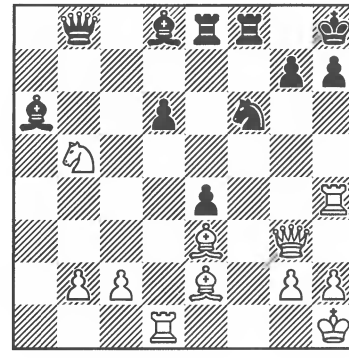
26...e4 27.♗e2 ♗c8



28.♕g3

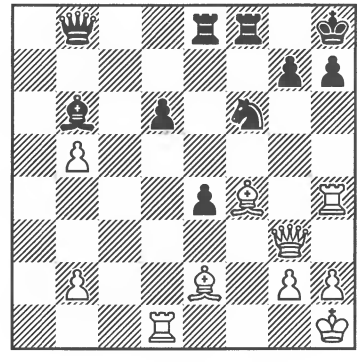
Perhaps 28.g4!? d5 29.♖xd5 might have been a little stronger; but the commandment I had given myself before the game – don't play g2-g4! – was still in force.

28...♗a6



After this move, I could see that my plan of 29.♕xd6 was dubious, since after 29... ♕xd6 30.♖xd6, Black has 30...♘d5! 31.♖h3 ♘xe3 32.♖xe3 ♗g5 33.♖b3 ♖f2 34.♖xa6 ♖xe2, when the e-pawn is too dangerous.

29.c4 ♗xb5 30.cxb5 ♗b6 31.♗f4

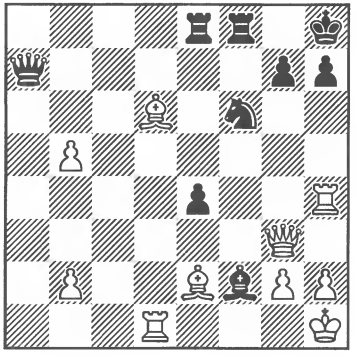


Here, everything started spinning, as if I had fallen into an uncharted whirlpool. My clock kept ticking down; the tension reached its apogee. I was just lucky that the game had so entranced me that there was no chance of my taking even a second to breathe; otherwise, I'm afraid, my last bits of strength might have escaped with my breath. After 31.♗xb6 ♕xb6 32.♖xd6 (but not 32.♕xd6? because of 32...♕f2) 32...♖c8 33.♖d1 ♖c2 34.♗f1 e3, Black's pawn looks very dangerous. Or 31.♗g5 d5 32.♕xb8 ♖xb8 33.♗xf6 ♖xf6 34.♖xd5,

and in this position, despite the extra pawn, I would prefer Black.

31...♕a7 32.♗xd6 ♗f2

From this point on, I was playing "only" moves.



33.♕f4

The following variations all led to inferior positions: 33.♕a3 (at some point, I thought seriously of playing this move, but then I got myself under control, and played 33.♕f4 instead) 33...♕xa3 34.bxa3 ♗xh4 35.♗xf8 ♖xf8 36.g3 ♗g5 37.a4 ♖b8 38.a5 ♔g8 39.b6 ♗e3. I couldn't make an exact assessment of this position. Perhaps White will not lose; but since Black has succeeded in stopping the passed pawns, White will be facing a difficult defense.

The difference between the move I actually played and other queen retreats is that after 33.♕h3 ♗xh4, for instance, I can't reply 34.♗xf8 because of 34...♕f2!. Or 33.♕g5 ♗xh4, when I would have to continue 34.♕xh4 ♖f7 with an inferior position.

33...♘d5

After 33...♗xh4 34.♗xf8 ♖xf8 35.♕xh4, White has no problems.

34.♕c1!

Again, the only move. 34.♕d2 ♗xh4 35.♗xf8 ♘e3 doesn't work, since I don't have the ♗c5 idea that comes into play after 34.♕c1. And on 34.♕g5 ♗xh4 35.♕xd5 ♖d8, Black is better.

34...♖c8

34...♗xh4 35.♗xf8 ♕f2 (35...♘e3 36.♗c5!) 36.♖xd5 (after 36.♗xg7+ ♔xg7 37.♖xd5 ♕xe2 38.♖g5+ ♗xg5 39.♕xg5+ ♔f7 40.♕f5+ ♔e7 41.♕e5+ we get a study-like draw, as the black king cannot hide from the checks) 36...♖xf8 37.♕d1, and White is better.

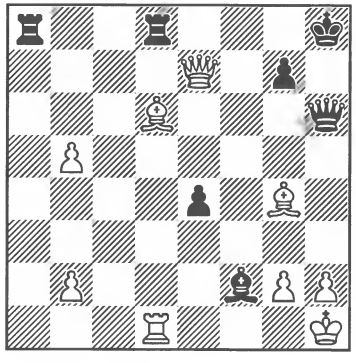
35.♕d2 ♖fd8

I gave a sigh of relief after this move. Black could try 35...♗xh4, when White would still have a couple of accurate moves to find: 36.♗xf8 ♘e3 37.b6! ♕xb6 38.♗xg7+! ♔xg7 39.♕d7+. But if White manages to reach this position, only she can win it: 39...♔g6 40.♖d6+ ♗f6 41.♗h5+ ♔xh5 42.♕f7+ ♔g4 43.♕e6+ ♔h5 44.g4+! *Luft!*

36.♖xh7+! ♔xh7 37.♕xd5 ♕e3 38.♗g4 ♖a8 39.♕e6?

Blindness. I could have ended the game right here by 39.b6!, when Black would be unable to stop this pawn.

39...♔h8 40.♕e7 ♕h6



Time pressure is over. Here, I could take a breath, settle down, and make a strong and logical move.

41. h3! ♕g6?!

Better to have advanced the pawn closer to its queening square: 41...e3 42.b6 e2 (42...♖e8? 43.b7) 43.♗xe2 ♗xb6, with an approximately equal position.

42.♕e5 ♗b6

From her last few moves, I could sense that my opponent, too, was losing strength.

43.♗h5 ♕h6 44.♗g4

A silent draw offer.

44...e3

She needed to put the rook in a better position, behind the passed pawn, by 44...♖e8.

45.♕e4 ♕f6?

The last mistake in this game. 45... ♖e8 46.♕c6 e2 47.♗xe2 ♖ac8 48.♕f3 ♖c1 was more stubborn, but White would run no risk of losing in any event.

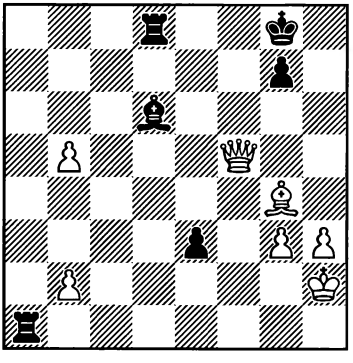
46.♖d5! ♖a1+

46...♖xd6 47.♖h5+ ♔g8 48.♕xa8+ would not have saved her, because of 48... ♖d8 49.♕a2+!.

47.♔h2 ♕xd6+ 48.♖xd6 ♗c7 49.♕f5 ♗xd6+

49...♖xd6 50.♕c8+ ♗d8 51.♗d7 would lose as well.

50.g3 ♔g8



51.♕d5+

And here, once again in this championship, I decide that a bird in hand is worth two in the bush – so I force the draw, even though Black could resign after 51.♗f3.

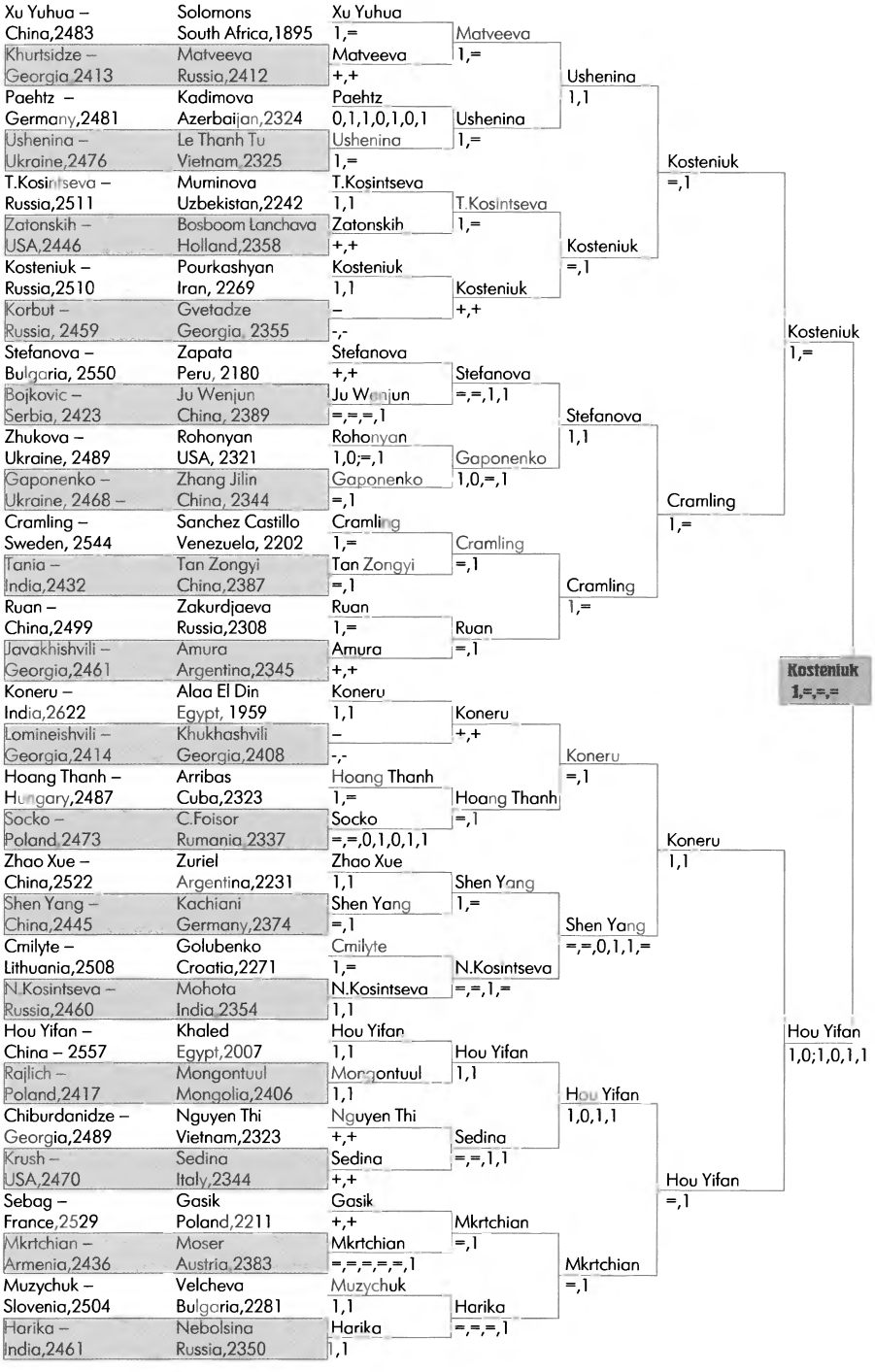
51...♔f8 52.♕f5+ ♔e7 53.♕e6+ ♔f8 54.♕f5+ ♔g8 55.♕d5+ ♔f8 56.♕f5+. Draw.

It's over! I'm World Champion!!!

Even now, as I write these words, I find it hard to believe. After the game ended, I had but one thought: "It's finally over!" – meaning that I could finally relax and not have to think about tomorrow's game, not get myself fired up, and not battle insomnia and the constant nervous tension. It's almost impossible to explain, to those who know little about the struggle that is tournament

The coveted World Championship medal

Draw of the Women's World Championship 2008



chess, about the enormous strain on the nerves that a chessplayer experiences during serious competition. No scientific studies have ever been conducted on how intense this strain is; but sometimes, during a game, your soul is so gripped, and your adrenaline runs so strong, that the moment when the game ends and the clocks are stopped seems like the most wonderful gift in the world.

Chess indisputably gives the winner great happiness; but the path you take to reach that victory requires you to spend so much time and effort, that every time you reach the finish line, you think: this will be the last tournament – I haven't the strength and energy to withstand this pressure any more. But the tournament ends, life goes on; and after a while, you're sitting down at the board again, setting up the pieces, ready to fight again, to endure, and to win.

After the championship was over, I was deliriously happy. Strong emotions and feelings can be hard to put into words. I had spent my whole life working toward this moment – and now, just like a fairy tale, it had all come true. The evening after the fourth match game, and the following day, when the grand closing ceremony took place, were like a waking dream to me. My cell phone, Diego's phone, Dad's phone, our hotel phone – all rang off the hook from people calling to congratulate me on my victory. I gave countless interviews. All the major Russian TV channels included an item about my victory in their news broadcasts. The following day, the Sindica Hotel, where the tournament was held, received a congratulatory telegram from the President of Russia, Dmitry Medvedev; and a few days later, the Russian Chess Federation in Moscow received fresh congratulations from the prime minister, Vladimir Putin.

For the closing ceremony, the organizers had had specially made for me a baroness's costume from the Kabardino-Balkaria region, which made me really feel like a queen. At the brilliant and beautiful closing ceremony, I was awarded a laurel wreath, a medal, and a gold crown, decorated with a shower of diamonds and sapphires. And then, in front of a crowd of spectators, I danced the regional dance, the kafu. The closing ceremony ended with an amazingly beautiful laser show on the main square of Nalchik. Against the darkened sky, the lasers' piercing beams lit up a banner reading: "Alexandra Kosteniuk – Women's World Chess Champion!"

However my life and chess career turn out after this, I am most happy to have become the 12th Women's World Champion, fulfilling the dream of every girl who ever started to learn about this mysterious and absorbing black-and-white world. The moment when I stood upon the stage, wearing the laurel wreath, gold medal and crown upon my head, will remain forever etched in my memory. This sweet moment of victory....

The sweet moment of victory. On the left, FIDE and Republic of Kalmykia President Kirsan Ilyumzhinov; on the right, Kabardino-Balkaria President Arsen Kanokov

With coaches Konstantin Landa and Yuri Razuvaev

Chapter 11
Being World Champion

The reader may be surprised that I didn't conclude this book after my victory at Nalchik. However, I could not relax and savor my victory after the World Championship – two weeks later I had to fly off to yet another historic event: the First World Mind Sports Games in Beijing. We had a short training session to go over the games played in Nalchik; then, once again, I packed my bags.

The Intellectual Games in Beijing were, for me, one more event in 2008 to which I had eagerly looked forward. While preparing for Nalchik that June, I studied with equal interest the schedule for the Games in Beijing, which seemed to carry the status of a world championship. The idea of gathering under one roof every intellectual form of sport, and thereby get ourselves into the Olympic family at the outset, seemed to me the right way to go. I should note right away that I have a special, reverent attitude toward the Olympic Games, and I certainly don't feel it's right that to this day, chess has not found a place in the Olympic family. So I try to do everything in my power to help chess become part of the Olympic movement. There are many who object that chess is not a physical kind of sport; but they cannot argue that chess is not an intellectual form of sport. We should not forget that the Olympian ideal is a philosophy of life, lifting and uniting into a balanced whole the achievements of body, will, and mind.

For reasons unknown to me, the Russian Chess Federation decided to ignore the Games. When I learned of this decision, I took the initiative in my own hands and put together a women's team myself; this was the team that traveled to China. Many thanks to all the girls who supported me and responded to my invitation to appear in Beijing "under Olympic conditions." Here was the lineup of our golden team: Alexandra Kosteniuk, Natalia Pogonina, Valentina Gunina, and Irina Vasilevich. Baira Kovanova also took part in the individual events.

The World Intellectual Games in Beijing were a continuation of the Olympic and Paralympic Games. Over 4420 sportsmen, from 126 countries, took part. The host country, China, put forward the largest team – 479 members. France sent 110 to Beijing; Russia and the USA sent 108 apiece. This was a genuine festival of intellectual sport. In the enormous center, under one roof, we intellectuals played for 35 sets of prizes: ten for chess, nine for bridge, six for Go, and five for checkers and the Chinese version of chess, xiangqi.

As the games took place just two weeks after Nalchik, there was of course not enough time for me to recover fully. For after winning a tournament as difficult as the World Championship, a full recovery might take several months. But after Nalchik, I was full of emotional drive; and this helped me to play in spite of

my fatigue. Additionally, in 2008 I actually had become World Champion twice: in Fischer-style chess and in classical women's chess. And of course, I wanted this rain of gold to continue.

In Beijing, I succeeded in winning the first-ever World Intellectual Games gold, by outplaying the ex-world champion Antoaneta Stefanova in an absorbing blitz finale. As part of the team, we won another gold in blitz – outplaying the star-studded Chinese team – and the bronze in rapid chess. I played 53 games in Beijing, and some of them were very good indeed.

No. 62 Ruy López C92

A. Kosteniuk – Zhao Xue

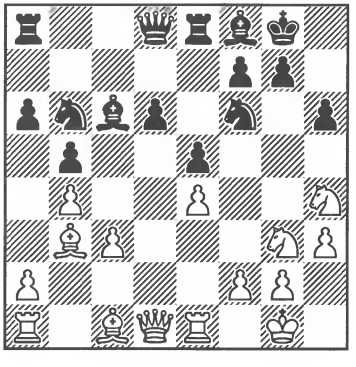
Beijing 2008

This game was played in the semifinal of the blitz tournament.

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 a6 4.♗a4 ♘f6 5.0-0 ♗e7 6.♖e1 b5 7.♗b3 d6 8.c3 0-0 9.h3 ♗b7 10.d4 ♖e8

Zaitsev Variation. Up until move 18, we repeated my game against Inarkiev (Game 45).

11.♘bd2 ♗f8 12.d5 ♘b8 13.♘f1 ♘bd7 14.♘g3 ♘c5 15.♗c2 c6 16.b4 ♘cd7 17.dxc6 ♗xc6 18.♗b3 h6 19.♘h4 ♘b6



20.♘g6!?

I had wanted to play this new move for several years – since 2005, in fact.

20...♖c8?

Black's path to equality was demonstrated in the following game: 20...d5! 21.♘xf8 ♔xf8! 22.♗e3 ♘c4 23.♗c5+ ♔g8 24.♕e2 ♖e6 25.a4 ♕e8 26.f3 ♖d8 27.♖ed1 ♖d7 28.axb5 axb5 29.♗c2 ♘b2 30.♖db1 ♘c4 31.♖d1 ♘b2 32.♖db1 ♘c4 33.♖d1, draw. Gashimov-Kasimdzhanov, Elista 2008.

21.♘xf8 ♖xf8 22.♘f5 d5 23.♗e3 ♘c4 24.♗xc4 bxc4 25.exd5 ♗xd5 26.♗c5

And I was able to bring the game to its logical conclusion confidently enough (considering that this was a 3-minute game).

26...♖xc5 27.bxc5 ♕c7 28.♕e2 ♖e8 29.♕e3 ♕c6 30.♕g3 g6 31.♘xh6+ ♔f8 32.♖xe5 ♖c8 33.f3 ♕xc5+ 34.♕f2 ♕d6 35.♖ae1 ♘d7 36.♖5e2 ♔g7 37.♘g4 ♗e6 38.♖d2 ♕c5 39.♕xc5

39.♖xe6 would also have been good.

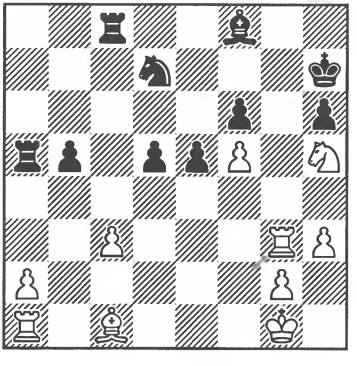
39...♘xc5 40.♘e5 ♘a4 41.♖e3 ♖b8 42.♘c6 ♖b1+ 43.♔f2 ♖c1 44.♘d4 ♗d7 45.♘e2. Black resigned.

I managed an attractive finish in the following rapid-chess game.

No.63

A. Kosteniuk – Shen Yang

Beijing 2008



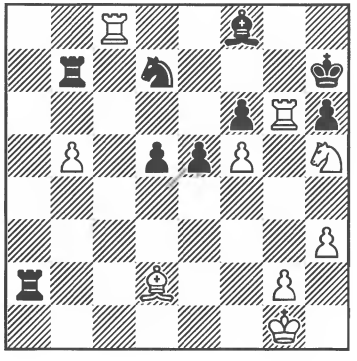
32.♖g6 ♖a6 33.♗d2 ♖cc6 34.♖b1!

Exploiting the fact that Black's pieces are tied to the defense of their king and the kingside.

34...b4 35.cxb4 ♖xa2 36.b5 ♖b6 37.♖c1! (threatening ♖c7) **37...♖b7**

Or 37...♖xd2 38.♖c7.

38.♖c8



And after 38...♖xd2, White mates prettily by 39.♖xf8 ♘xf8 40.♘xf6+ ♔h8 41.♖g8#.

The following game was played in the final blitz match between the Russian and Chinese teams. In Beijing, I was reminded what it's like to play on a well-meshed team. We rooted for and supported one another, and analyzed the games with interest after they were finished. Our positive attitude and excellent spirit allowed us to outplay Team China in the final, even though they brought their most star-studded lineup to the competition.

No.64 Giuoco Piano C54

Hou Yifan – A. Kosteniuk

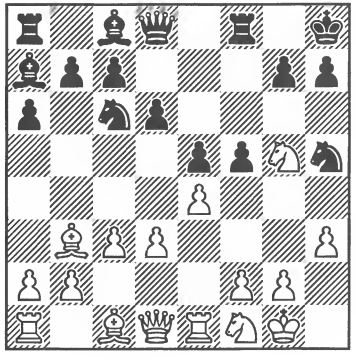
Beijing 2008

1.e4 e5 2.♗c4 ♘c6 3.♘f3 ♗c5 4.c3 ♘f6 5.d3 a6 6.♗b3 ♗a7 7.h3 0-0 8.0-0 d6 9.♘bd2

Our team won the first match by 2½-1½, so all we had to do for the second match was "just" not to lose. But of course, when you're playing blitz, you're not thinking about concrete results. Here, instead of the usual quiet continuations, I decided to play something a little bit more interesting.

9...♔h8 10.♖e1 ♘h5 11.♘f1 f5 12.♘g5

As soon as I saw this move, I concluded that I had probably mixed up my variations; however, once I had quashed the desire to resign immediately, I decided to carry on. In fact, the whole idea of this variation for Black is that, after winning the exchange, White finds it very hard to stop Black's plan of attacking on the kingside.



12...♕e8

12...g6 13.♘f7+ ♖xf7 14.♗xf7 fxe4 15.♗d5 exd3 16.♕xd3 would have been worse.

13.♗f7 ♖xf7 14.♕xh5 g6 15.♘xf7+ ♕xf7 16.♕e2

During the game I was more afraid of 16.♕f3 f4 17.♗e3, although here Black has definite compensation for the

exchange: 17...b6 (17...♗b8 18.d4 g5) 18.d4 g5 19.d5 ♘e7 20.♘h2 h5 21.♗d2 ♗d7 22.a4 ♕g6.

16...f4

After I got in this move, I realized that my position was not as bad as it had seemed to me earlier. What's more important is that I have an obvious plan of advancing my kingside pawns, and combining that with an attack on the white king. In blitz, it's a well-known fact that attacking is much easier than defending; and extra material here doesn't carry the same weight as a dangerous initiative.

17.♘h2 g5 18.b4 ♗d7 19.♗b2 ♖g8 20.d4

20.a4 h5 21.b5 was worth considering.

20...h5 21.♖ed1

And here, 21.a4 g4 22.hxg4 hxg4 23.b5 would still be interesting.

21...g4 22.hxg4 hxg4

By now I could safely say that Black stood better.

23.g3

On 23.a4 Black would have played 23...♕h5.

23...♕h5 24.♖d2 ♖g7 25.gxf4 exf4 26.♕f1 g3

Here 26...♘e5! would have won – an idea I could not find right away – because of 27.dxe5 g3 with a forced mate.

27.fxg3 fxg3

27...♖xg3+ 28.♔h1 (28.♖g2 ♗h3) 28...♗g4 29.♖f2 was better, when once again 29...♘e5! would have been strong.

28.♕f8+ ♔h7 29.♔h1

29.♘f3 ♗g4 30.♖f1.

29...♗h3

I didn't see that after 29...♖f7, a8 was the only square for White's queen to retreat to: 30. ♕a8 – but now, the queen is too far from the main action. Black continues 30...♗g4 and wins.

30.♕f3 ♕h6 31.♖e2 ♘e5!

Finally I noticed this maneuver, bringing the knight in. Here, after using up almost all of her remaining seconds, Hou played

32.♕f8

but let her queen tip over and then pressed

Team Russia with fans

the clock, which – according to the rules we were following in Beijing – meant that she lost. It should be said that White's position was hopeless anyway. For example, 32...gxh2 33.♖xh2 ♗g2+ 34.♔g1 ♘f3+, winning.

After our victory in this match, I was able once again to climb to the top step on the pedestal.

The year 2008 was a real golden one for me: I became World Champion for the second time in Fischerandom chess, then the 12th Women's World Champion, and finally secured two gold medals and one bronze at the World Intellectual Games. In 2008, I had several opportunities to take pride in achieving what I had worked long and hard to reach.

In this book, I have told my story, one which at times seemed like the tale of some chess Cinderella. I have tried to focus most intensely on those moments which helped me on my difficult path to chess success. I spent several months writing this book, and can take pride in the fact that every jot and tittle of the Russian edition was written by me personally. Perhaps at times this book gets too emotional; and somewhere, it must lack a more detailed analysis of what was taking place at the time. But it's just this kind of variety that makes up my life. Flashes of light alternate with moments of darkness, victories follow defeats, and the smiles and the laughter make you forget the tears. Everything I do, I try to do it 100%, putting my whole soul into it. I wanted very much to share my thoughts and feelings with the reader, and to provide a glimpse inside the palace of this royal game. I hope I have succeeded.

To conclude, I would like to address the young players reading these lines. Whether you get to be world champion or not is not important. The main thing is to set yourself a goal and to do everything in your power to achieve it. Remember that every moment has value, every minute is important. No one knows what life will bring; but the main thing is that, in the end, you will know that you tried, and that you made the effort to become better every day.

I will be happy if this book helps you to understand something new about the world of chess. May you find many strong moves, both on the chessboard and off it! Be brave, and always move forward!

Best wishes in chess and in life,

Alexandra Kosteniuk

MAIN TOURNAMENT AND MATCH RECORD

Event	Score	Place
1991		
Moscow Championship (Children Under 10)	6/9	1 (girls)
1992		
Moscow Championship (Girls Under 10)	9/9	1
Russian Championship (Girls Under 10), Lipetsk	7/9	2
1993		
Russian Championship (Girls Under 10), Yaroslavl	7/9	2
1994		
Russian Championship (Girls Under 10), Kazan	8/9	2
European Championship (Girls Under 10), Baile Herculane, Romania	7/9	1
World Championship (Girls Under 10), Szeged, Hungary	7.5/9	1-2
1996		
Russian Championship (Girls Under 12), Vologda	9/9	1
European Championship (Girls Under 12), Rimavská Sobota, Slovakia	8/9	1
World Championship (Girls Under 12), Cala Galdana, Spain	10/11	1

World Rapid Championship (Girls Under 12), Paris, France	8/9	1
Russian Rapid Championship (Women), Moscow	7/9	1

1998

33rd World Chess Olympiad (playing for the Kalmykian team), Elista, Kalmykia	10/13	Silver medal on second board
World Rapid Championship (Girls Under 14), Paris, France	8.5/9	1

1999

International Women's Tournament Grandmasters, Dresden, Germany	7.5/9	1
International Tournament, Moscow	7.5/11	1

2000

Russian Women's Championship Women, Elista	7.5/11	2

2001

European Rapid Championship, Minsk, Belarus	8.5/11	2
European Blitz Championship, Minsk, Belarus	33.5/40	1
FIDE World Championship	3-5 loss to Zhu Chen in final	2

2002

International Rapid Tournament, Spain	1-3 loss to Anatoly Karpov in final	2
35th World Chess Olympiad, Bled, Slovenia	6/10	2

Match Against the "Dream Team," Jakarta, Indonesia	6:0	
Swiss Blitz Championship	14/19	3

2003

European Club Champions Cup (playing for the club "Podgornitsa," Yugoslavia)	5/7	1
European Team Champoinship, Plovdiv, Bulgaria	5.5/7	3 (first place on third board)

2004

European Women's Championship, Dresden, Germany	9.5/12	1
International Rapid Tournament, Warsaw, Poland	6.5/10	1
Russian Women's Championship	8/11	2
36th World Chess Olympiad, Calvià, Spain	7/11	3

2005

World Biathlon Championship "Chess-Darts"		1
Russian Women's Championship, Samara	8/11	1
International Women's Tournament, Krasnoturinsk, Russia	5.5/9	2-3
International Open "Chess960" Tournament, Mainz, Germany	7/11	1 (women)
European Team Championship	3.5/7	3

2006

World "Chess960" Championship Match against E. Pähtz, Mainz, Germany	5.5-2.5	
International Rapid Tournament, Mexico	3.5/6	2-3
37th World Chess Olympiad, Torino, Italy	6/10	2

01.04.2006 Record rating of 2540

2007

International Rapid Tournament, Villandry, France		2
European Team Championship, Heraklion, Greece	5.5/8	1 (third place on first board)

2008

World Women's "Chess960" Championship, Mainz, Germany	Qualifier - 5.5/6 2.5-1.5 victory over Kateryna Lahno in final	1
FIDE World Championship, Nalchik, Russia	2.5-1.5 victory over Hou Yifan in final	1
World Mind Sports Games, Beijing, China	Gold medal in blitz (victory against Stefanova in final). Gold medal in team blitz (victory over China in final). Bronze medal in team rapid.	2 gold medals, 1 bronze

List of Opponents

(numbers refer to games or fragments of games)

Almasi	51	Peng Zhaoqin	28, 49
Chalabashvili	1	Pähtz	43
Cramling	58, 59	Pogonina	34
Cvitan	23	Pokorna	5
Danielian	42	Polovnikova	31
Dvoyris	24	Popov V.	38
Huss	22	Rogers	21
Hoang Thang Trang	13	Saulin	4
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Inarkiev	45	Sebag	25
Kempinski	41	Shen Yang	63
Khurtsidze	19	Skripchenko	29
Kononenko	12	Slavina	30
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Kudrin	7	Ushenina	57
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Onischuk	33	Zhuravlev	3

List of Openings

(numbers refer to games)

Réti's Opening
A07 - 42

Dutch Defense
A87 - 6; A90 - 17

Scandinavian Defense
B01 - 4

Pirc-Ufimtsev Defense
B06 - 25

Caro-Kann Defense
B12 - 21, 44

Sicilian Defense
B28 - 41; B31 - 8; B33 - 20; B42 - 30; B51 - 35; B53 - 7; B63 - 32; B66 - 9, 11, 19; B76 - 34; B80 - 18; B85 - 61; B96 - 48; B97 - 24, 39; B99 - 15

French Defense
C00 - 3; C10 - 58; C11 - 12, 49; C15 - 40

Bishop's Opening
C30 - 5

King's Knight Opening
C40 - 1

Philidor's Defense
C41 - 29

Petroff's Defense
C42 - 16

Four Knights' Game
C47 - 14

Giuoco Piano
C54 - 64

Ruy López
C65 - 33; C67 - 51; C88 - 47, 56; C89 - 46; C90 - 60; C92 - 31, 62

Slav Defense
D10 - 26

Queen's Gambit Declined
D35 - 2

Semi-Slav Defense
D47 - 13

Queen's Indian Defense
E17 - 54

Nimzo-Indian Defense
E32 - 22; E35 - 57